

Developing soft skills for law students through the flipped learning method

Diana Yankova

^aNew Bulgarian University, Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, 21 Montevideo str., 1618 Sofia, Bulgaria

Keywords: soft skills, flipped classroom, legal studies

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper explores strategies for cultivating soft skills in law students, ensuring they are well-prepared for multidisciplinary environments. The benefits of flipped learning are discussed at length and a sample flipped learning activity teaching soft skills for law students that has proved successful at NBU is presented. The activity can be used as a blueprint, adapted or as is in any law class for teaching, developing or practicing negotiation and conflict resolution skills, which are quite relevant for future practitioners in the legal profession.

In today's rapidly evolving professional landscape, technical expertise alone is insufficient for success. Law students must acquire not only domain-specific knowledge but also transferable soft skills — such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership — that will enable them to thrive in a variety of contexts. These soft skills are the bridge between technical competence and real-world application, facilitating collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving across disciplines. Teaching these transferable skills to students from diverse academic backgrounds helps them become versatile professionals, capable of addressing complex societal challenges. Soft skills are integral to the practice of law, complementing technical legal knowledge. Lawyers must possess strong interpersonal communication, empathy, the ability to work collaboratively, and problem-solving skills in high-pressure situations. However, the time specifically devoted to this aspect of the learning process at universities is negligibly small. Admitting that soft skills are central to the effective practicing of the legal profession since it largely entails working with people, Williams and Do (2022: 14) claim that “law academics tend to be resistant to teaching soft skills. The main reasons cited are that it is beyond the scope of their role as a law academic, and that it is not possible to add those skills to the already crowded curriculum”. By incorporating experiential learning, interdisciplinary projects, and ethical discussions into their education, students are equipped not only with technical expertise but also with the essential soft skills needed to collaborate, innovate, and lead in various career paths. This holistic approach to education ensures that graduates can navigate the challenges of the modern world with confidence and competence.

However, traditional legal education tends to emphasize doctrinal knowledge and theoretical analysis over these skills, which can leave students underprepared for the realities of legal practice. The flipped classroom is an innovative teaching model that has gained popularity in recent years, especially in higher education. It offers a unique solution by focusing classroom time on practical, hands-on experiences that cultivate these crucial competencies. It is an innovative teaching model that has gained popularity in recent years, especially in higher education. This pedagogical approach reverses the traditional model of teaching by delivering instructional content, often online, outside the classroom, and moving active learning, including exercises and group activities, into the classroom (cf. Bergmann & Sams 2012, Van Alten et al. 2019, Meyliana et al. 2021, Han et al. 2024). For law students, flipped learning presents a powerful method for teaching soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for success in the legal profession. By transforming passive learning into an active, student-centered process, flipped learning fosters deeper engagement with both theoretical knowledge and the development of critical soft skills.

Additionally, it fosters greater student accountability, collaboration, and flexibility, all of which are essential for successful learning. As universities continue to adopt innovative teaching methods, the flipped classroom stands out as a promising approach that can significantly improve outcomes for learners. Modern interactive learning methods emphasize active engagement, collaboration, and the use of technology to enhance the learning experience. These approaches are increasingly integrated into legal education and other fields to foster deeper understanding, critical thinking, and practical skills.

It is argued that although there have been studies that do not support fully the effectiveness of flipped learning (cf. Fisher et al. 2024), there are many benefits to this method in the development of soft skills for law students. One such benefit is students' deeper engagement. By moving passive content delivery out of the classroom, flipped learning maximizes the time spent on active, hands-on learning. This shift leads to greater engagement, as students are directly involved in discussions, problem-solving, and collaborative exercises that mirror real-world legal challenges. Another is personalized feedback: flipped learning provides more opportunities for personalized feedback, as instructors can observe students' interactions and decision-making processes in real-time. This feedback is crucial for the development of soft skills, such as communication and emotional intelligence, which are difficult to assess in traditional lecture formats. A third and a very important one is the self-paced learning that this method provides: it allows students to absorb theoretical knowledge at their own pace, freeing up classroom time for the development of soft skills. This self-paced learning is particularly beneficial for diverse learners, as students use class time more efficiently.

REFERENCES

1. Bergmann, J., & Sams, A.: Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day. Internal Society for Technology in Education (2012).
2. Fisher, R., Tran, Q. & Verezub, E.: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Higher Education using flipped learning/flipped classrooms: a literature review. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 18(4), 332-351, DOI: 10.1080/17501229.2024.2302984 (2024).
3. Han, H., Røkenes, F. and Krumsvik, R.: Student teachers' perceptions of flipped classroom in EFL teacher education. *Education and Information Technologies*. 29, 1539–1558. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11839-w> (2024).
4. Meyliana, Sablan, B., Surjandy, & Hidayanto, A. N.: Flipped learning effect on classroom engagement and outcomes in university information systems class. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(3), 3341–3359. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10723-9> (2021).
5. Van Alten, D. C. D., Phielix, C., Janssen, J., & Kester, L.: Effects of flipping the classroom on learning outcomes and satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, 28, 100281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.05.003> (2019).
6. Williams, K. and Do, C.: Teaching Law Students Soft Skills Online. *Western Australian Law Teachers' Review*, 9-15. (2022).