

## Reframing the Socratic Method for Legal Education in the Digital Age

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### Abstract:

Traditional legal education, usually focused on the Socratic method, faces both opportunities and challenges due to the rise of digital platforms. Digital tools can promote inclusivity for marginalized students through online forums and virtual classrooms, and AI can tailor education. However, this transition raises questions regarding student participation, algorithmic bias, and the quality of knowledge.

Effective digital adaptation in legal education entails reinventing Socratic teaching through the integration of educational theory and technology, retaining human conversation, and assuring institutional support and ethical AI principles. This technique permits legal education to grow while keeping the analytical rigor essential to the Socratic method.

**Key Words:** Socratic method, digital age, AI, legal studies, learning, thinking...

### Introduction:

The way we're merging the Socratic Method into online learning is perhaps one of the most exciting things happening in today's legal education. This strategy has been a staple in law schools for over a hundred years, but adapting it for online and hybrid classes presents a whole new set of opportunities and issues that we need to think through carefully and tackle with ingenuity.

The Socratic Method really took root at Harvard Law School, thanks to Christopher Columbus Langdell, who served as dean from 1870 until 1895. He was the one who introduced the case technique as the major approach of teaching.

Rather than focusing on abstract legal ideas through lectures, Langdell introduced students to actual court decisions, employing systematic questioning to assist students extract and comprehend legal reasoning from judicial opinions.

Instead of just speaking about abstract legal principles, Langdell had students dive into real court cases, utilising targeted questions to help them tear apart and comprehend the legal rationale behind judicial judgements.

While people sometimes mix up the case method with Socratic questioning, they're actually two independent innovations—the case method gives us the material (those real court judgements), while the Socratic method provides the teaching style (the directed questions that inspire analysis).

Recent study has brought up several successful strategies to adapt the Socratic Method for digital learning. One especially promising technique is the "soft Socratic method", which

blends a milder questioning style with supportive, human-centered teaching principles that perform well in online contexts.

This new method originates from feedback received at Harvard Law School and was fine-tuned for online use between 2016 and 2018. It shows that you can still have effective Socratic teaching without relying on the more aggressive questioning approaches that have been traditionally related to legal education.

Reframing the Socratic Method for Legal Education in the Digital Age necessitates moving beyond traditional face-to-face questioning toward more inclusive, technology-enhanced forms of dialogue.

In current legal education, digital tools can encourage critical thinking, student involvement, and flexible access to learning while keeping the reflective and analytical strengths of the Socratic approach (Thanaraj & Gledhill, 2023; Aswathy & Nair, 2024).

At the same time, this adaptation demands for pedagogical sensitivity so that digital innovation supports fairness, accessibility, and meaningful involvement rather than perpetuating exclusionary classroom dynamics (Silver & Crossley, 2024).

Thus, the modern Socratic method should be seen not as a set tradition, but as an evolving pedagogical paradigm adaptable to technological development and varied learners' demands.

## **Chapter 1: Philosophical Foundations and Historical Evolution of the Socratic Method in Legal Education**

The conceptual basis of the Socratic approach in legal education lie in disciplined inquiry, critical thinking, and the pursuit of reasoned judgment rather than mechanical memorization. Historically, however, the method was moulded at American law schools into a case-based, professor-led classroom technique tightly tied to appellate analysis and the purpose of training students to “think like lawyers” (Abrams, 2015; Sheppard, 1997).

More recent work has explored this legacy by suggesting that modern legal education often departs from Socrates' original dialogic spirit, which was more exploratory and less hierarchical than present cold-calling techniques suggest (Krook, 2017).

Accordingly, the historical growth of the approach demonstrates both its lasting instructional relevance and the necessity to rethink it in light of its philosophical foundations (Abrams, 2015; Krook, 2017).

The Socratic Method has its roots in ancient Greece, where it was all about using discussion to promote critical thinking and shed light on various concepts (Stojković & Zerkin, 2023).

Let's move to the late 19th century, when this system made its debut into legal education, taking shape as the casebook method. This technique teaches students to draw legal ideas from judicial decisions through a process of directed questioning. What's the main aim? It's all about developing critical reasoning and debate abilities, empowering students to actively construct their own knowledge of the law (Davey, 2008).

### **1.1 Origins and Classical Principles of Socratic Dialogue**

The origins of Socratic discussion lie in classical Athens, where Socrates utilized disciplined inquiry to challenge claims to knowledge and to guide interlocutors toward intellectual humility and clearer thinking. Rather than delivering fixed doctrines, he typically proceeded through elenchus—a form of cross-examination that exposed contradictions in received opinions—and through aporia, a state of puzzlement that opened the way for deeper inquiry (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005/2008).

In Plato's early dialogues, this strategy is tightly related to the search for ethical definitions and to the notion that genuine wisdom begins with acknowledging one's own ignorance (Plato, trans. 1997). Thus, the fundamental ideas of Socratic debate combine critical analysis, dialogic reasoning, and moral-philosophical self-scrutiny rather than passive acceptance of authority (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.; Plato, trans. 1997).

The Socratic Method, which has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, depends on a sequence of thoughtful questions to help learners acquire knowledge through interesting debates (James, 2012, pp.66-88).

Its fundamental elements—open-ended questions, self-reflection, the formation of arguments, and a sense of intellectual community—are still vital in legal education today. They promote the analytical thinking skills that are required for applying abstract legal theories to the complicated reality of the world around us (Stojković & Zerkin, 2023).

#### **A- Historical evolution of Socratic questioning from ancient Athens to modern education**

The Socratic Method has its roots in ancient Athens, where it began as a technique to participate in critical thought. Over time, it evolved into a more structured teaching technique, especially creating waves in legal education during the nineteenth century (Davey, 2008).

Socratic inquiry has come a long way, going from classical dialogue-based philosophy to the modern casebook method, all aimed at improving legal reasoning and analytical skills within educational institutions (Ozturk, 2025).

Even after all these years of evolution, the core principle hasn't changed: authentic knowledge comes from asking the correct questions and engaging in collaborative thinking, rather than merely being passed down from those in authority. This is what makes Socratic conversation such a distinctive teaching style, one that continues to be vital in influencing legal education today (Stojković & Zerkin, 2023).

#### **B- Integration of Socratic concepts into legal education through the casebook approach**

The casebook technique, which was pioneered by Christopher Columbus Langdell at Harvard Law School, infuses Socratic concepts into the fabric of legal teaching. This technique combines carefully chosen judicial opinions to generate a learning atmosphere where teachers provide thought-provoking questions, enabling students to participate in critical analysis, refine their reasoning abilities, and enhance their comprehension of legal ideas (Sheppard, 1997, p.547).

Contemporary variations of this method focus on making learning more accessible by combining dialogic feedback and collaborative activities. The idea is to ensure that all students are engaged equally while also developing the kind of rigorous analytical thinking that's required for success in legal practice (Joshua, 2017).

### **C- Community of inquiry and shared intellectual responsibility in Socratic learning**

In Socratic learning, a community of inquiry turns conversation away from one-way instruction toward a collaborative search for explanations, meanings, and better judgments. On this paradigm, knowledge is not seen as something merely transmitted by the teacher, but as something that emerges through collaborative discussion in which participants question assumptions, evaluate arguments, and construct understanding together (Lipman, 1982; Kennedy, 2012).

This also fosters shared intellectual responsibility, since learners are expected not just to defend their own views but also to respond thoughtfully to the ideas of others and help sustain the quality of the inquiry itself (Garrison, n.d.; Lenart, 2021). In that sense, Socratic learning becomes both a method of critical thinking and a shared practice of reflective involvement.

In Socratic learning, a “community of inquiry” refers to a group of learners and a teacher who work together to investigate questions (Rubin, 2012, pp.79-182). Here, understanding develops through discussion rather than just a one-sided flow of information. This approach emphasizes the need of meaningful debates and a shared responsibility for the group’s thinking and learning journey using digital assets (Davey, 2008).

#### **1.2 The Socratic Method in Contemporary Legal Pedagogy: Strengths and Limitations**

In current legal schooling, the Socratic approach is appreciated for developing analytical reasoning, oral advocacy, and the practice of testing legal arguments through structured questioning (Abrams, 2015). At the same hand, new literature emphasizes that when it depends primarily on cold-calling and hierarchical classroom pressure, it may hinder student wellness, inclusion, and equal engagement (Harvey-Broughton, 2024; Silver & Crossley, 2024).

The Socratic method in legal education is a great instrument for honing critical thinking and legal analysis skills, but it does come with some substantial downsides, notably in practical and psychological aspects. This technique invites students to go deep into legal principles through fascinating debates, which actually fosters active learning (Sachin, 2022, pp.94-98).

On the flip hand, its combative manner can put quieter pupils at a disadvantage and create a setting that might not match every legal circumstance (Greenfield & Niemczyk, 2023, pp.27-40). Critics propose that we should mix in alternative teaching approaches, such clinics and simulations, to foster collaborative and client-focused abilities that are more in touch with the demands of today’s legal education (Bedford et al., 2024).

Current debates consequently do not reject the method altogether, but argue for a more inclusive and carefully crafted alternative that keeps rigor while eliminating intimidation and exclusion.

#### **A- Empirical research on usefulness of Socratic Method in developing critical thinking**

Research demonstrates that the Socratic Method especially shines when it comes to enhancing critical thinking skills in school settings. Studies that adopt a quasi-experimental approach have revealed considerable improvements in critical thinking, notably in areas like math, reading comprehension, and healthcare education, when Socratic questioning is employed instead of typical teaching approaches (Ho et al., 2023).

This strategy helps strengthen analytical thinking, inference, and metacognitive awareness through well-crafted questions. That said, its performance mostly depends on how well the instructor can tailor their questions to match the students' developmental stages, and it can vary in efficacy based on the context, with varied levels of success in transferring abilities across diverse circumstances (Lintangsari, 2022).

### **B- Documented psychological and social impacts on varied student populations**

Documented literature reveals that the Socratic method can effect student populations unevenly, especially when it is employed through high-pressure cold-calling. Research on East Asian international students found that greater difficulty with Socratic classroom communication was associated with higher stress and lower self-efficacy, suggesting that the method may function as a cultural and psychological stressor for some learners (Langen & Stamov Roßnagel, 2023).

In legal education, current work likewise indicates that traditional Socratic teaching might limit welfare and engagement across diverse student groups unless it is changed to minimize obstacles and provide more supportive classroom environments (Harvey-Broughton, 2024; Silver & Crossley, 2024). These findings demonstrate that the social and psychological consequences of the approach are not universal, but affected by culture, classroom climate, and students' sense of belonging.

Research reveals that the Socratic Method influences student groups in diverse ways. For some, it encourages critical thinking, whereas for others—especially those from Confucian backgrounds—it can lead to stress (Langen & Stamov, 2023).

Women and minority students could feel out of place in traditional settings, which can increase existing disadvantages. However, by adopting improvements that stress open communication, teamwork, and a sense of psychological safety, we can overcome these difficulties and build fairer learning experiences for everyone (Silver & Crossley, 2024).

### **C- Comparative study with diverse pedagogical methodologies (directed questions, case method modifications)**

Broader legal-pedagogy literature likewise shows rising interest in moving beyond a particular *Langdellian* format toward more flexible classroom designs that mix doctrinal study with interactive and practice-oriented learning (Jennison, 2013). In this comparison approach, directed enquiries and modified case techniques look less as deviations from Socratic teaching than as contemporary adaptations of it.

The Socratic method encourages students to uncover solutions by asking and critical thinking, which increases their comprehension but might limit engagement to just those who are directly involved in the debate.

On the other hand, guided instruction is ideal for efficiently passing on knowledge, yet it could result in students becoming passive learners. The case technique is fantastic for developing problem-solving skills in context, although it does require a significant amount of effort and direction.

While Socratic discussion works well with cognitivism, constructivist methods and active simulations truly improve student participation. Plus, connectivism makes use of technology to develop links across different disciplines (Schindle et al., 2014, pp.11-29).

Comparative studies reveals that the conventional Socratic method is most effective when altered rather than applied in its most rigorous form. Reframed models favor more purposeful questioning, skills-focused dialogue, and problem-centered discussion, while newer case-method modifications integrate multimodal and student-supportive techniques to reduce intimidation without sacrificing analytical rigor (Abrams, 2015; Harvey-Broughton, 2024).

## **Chapter 2: Digital Transformation and the Redesign of Socratic Pedagogy**

Digital transformation has prompted legal educators to redesign Socratic pedagogy so that rigorous questioning can operate through online platforms, multimodal teaching, and AI-aware curricula rather than only through traditional in-class exchange.

Recent scholarship argues that legal education must be modernized to prepare students for technology-shaped legal practice, while still preserving critical reasoning and dialogic engagement as core pedagogical aims.

At the same time, redesigned Socratic approaches increasingly emphasize inclusivity, reduced cold-calling pressure, and broader participation through supportive, multimodal methods. In this sense, digital-era Socratic pedagogy is less a rejection of tradition than a structured adaptation of it to new technological and educational realities (Thanaraj & Gledhill, 2024; Aswathy & Nair, 2024; Harvey-Broughton, 2024; Silver & Crossley, 2024).

Digital transformation combines AI chatbots and massive language models for tailored learning. Open-source models on student devices enhance access to tutoring and foster autonomous thinking. Combining live classes with AI coaching enhances engagement and feedback. Maintaining the role of instructors is vital to maintain meaningful discourse effective.

### **2.1 Technological Tools and Platforms for Enhanced Socratic Learning**

Technological tools and platforms have increased Socratic learning by allowing questioning, reflection, and dialogue to continue beyond the traditional classroom. In legal education, digital platforms are increasingly used to modernize teaching and support more flexible, technology-aware forms of inquiry, while generative AI tools can also help cultivate critical reasoning when integrated responsibly into the curriculum (Thanaraj & Gledhill, 2024; Aswathy & Nair, 2024).

Recent research further suggests that Socratic chatbots can increase critical thinking by prompting learners with structured questions instead of merely offering direct answers (Favero et al., 2024). Together, these developments demonstrate that digital platforms do not replace the Socratic method but might strengthen its dialogic and reflective purposes when wisely built.

Generative AI frameworks (SPL, SocratiQ) and customised chatbot-based assistants provide scalable, individualised Socratic instruction through adaptive questioning while developing critical thinking and broader accessibility. Multiagent LLM systems like Socrates 2.0 extend Socratic conversation applications throughout academic and therapeutic sectors. These technologies address important pedagogical difficulties of expanding personalization, promoting critical thinking, and democratizing access to interactive education (Jabbour et al., 2025).

### **A- Artificial intelligence applications: LLMs, dialogue systems, adaptive learning technologies**

Three AI technologies—Large Language Models, dialogue systems, and adaptive learning platforms—enhance education and human connection by providing specialized problem-solving, intelligent conversations, and tailored learning routes. Their combined potential for innovation needs overcoming privacy, prejudice, and accessibility concerns (Jelodar et al., 2025).

Artificial intelligence applications are increasingly altering learning through big language models, dialogue systems, and adaptive technologies that support more personalized and interactive educational experiences. Recent studies show that LLM-based systems can foster critical thinking through structured questioning rather than direct answer delivery, while adaptive learning companions can tailor explanations and learning paths to student responses and comprehension patterns (Favero et al., 2024; Jabbour et al., 2025).

In legal education, this transition is also linked to the growing requirement for AI literacy, ethical awareness, and the responsible integration of generative technologies into teaching and learning (Aswathy & Nair, 2024). Together, these discoveries imply that AI can promote thoughtful, student-centered instruction when employed as a framework for inquiry rather than a substitute for thought.

### **B- Blended learning approaches merging face-to-face and digital Socratic interaction**

Blended learning is all about integrating traditional face-to-face teaching with digital instruction. This approach increases Socratic dialogue by using AI-driven conversational tools and asynchronous questioning. By blending the personal touch of classroom interactions with the flexibility and personalization of online platforms, it stimulates critical thinking in numerous ways and helps create more inclusive educational experiences (Shahsavari, 2013, pp.184-198).

Blended learning approaches mix face-to-face discussion with digital interaction to expand Socratic questioning beyond the physical classroom.

Research on blended environments demonstrates that structured online Socratic questioning can improve critical thinking by allowing students greater space for contemplation, engagement, and dialogic discussion. In legal education, digital pedagogy likewise encourages the redesign of traditional instruction so that rigorous inquiry can operate across both in-person and technology-mediated settings.

This makes blended Socratic learning a feasible approach for keeping analytical depth while boosting flexibility and engagement (Shahsavari, 2013; Thanaraj & Gledhill, 2022).

### **C- Interactive tutoring systems and tailored Socratic questioning pathways**

Socratic teaching systems are wonderful at promoting critical thinking and reflective reasoning, even with minimum engagement from students. When coupled with adaptive intelligent tutoring systems and tailored questioning, they provide flexible, student-centered learning environments.

This approach pushes away from the one-size-fits-all model of education, adopting customized, inquiry-based methods that help pupils build crucial modern problem-solving skills (Favero et al., 2024).

Interactive tutoring systems increasingly use tailored Socratic questioning pathways to guide learners via contemplation instead of merely delivering answers.

Recent research describes dialogue-based tutors and Socratic chatbots that adapt suggestions to student responses, understanding patterns, and engagement levels in order to enhance critical thinking and personalized learning.

This illustrates a change from static coaching toward adaptive questioning frameworks that scaffold reasoning step by step rather than depending on one-size-fits-all instruction (Favero et al., 2024; Jabbour et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024/2026). Together, these systems exemplify how tailored Socratic paths can integrate interaction, learner modeling, and guided inquiry in digital education.

## **2.2 Challenges in Implementation and Recommendations for Equitable Digital Socratic Education**

Equitable digital Socratic education confronts major obstacles, particularly because of the digital gap and the absence of non-verbal clues. These concerns can alienate students who struggle with connecting or experience high levels of anxiety.

To address these hurdles, educational institutions should employ “low-bandwidth” hybrid teaching approaches that merge asynchronous preparation with real-time interactions.

Additionally, integrating chat capabilities can help make engagement more inclusive (Lindroos & Kucirkova, 2024). Achieving true fairness entails setting up clear criteria that allow technical faults and strike a balance between academic rigor and psychological safety, ensuring that no student feels left out in their digital learning environment (Ayeni & Eden, 2024, pp.199-206).

### **A- Algorithmic bias in AI-generated Socratic questions and assessment systems**

AI Socratic systems have the potential to worsen inequality by emphasising Western logic and standard language. This sometimes drives pupils to seek out a single “correct” answer instead of promoting genuine inquiry. Such bias in automated assessments might disfavour varied reasoning processes, underscoring the necessity for human monitoring to achieve fair and inclusive education (Hua et al., 2025).

Algorithmic bias offers a severe problem when AI systems create Socratic questions or support assessment, because biased training data and opaque model behavior can skew prompts, feedback, and evaluative judgments in ways that penalize some learners.

Recent research in education warns that bias can enter AI-driven assessment systems through data selection, model design, and deployment contexts, while audit-oriented studies reveal that LLMs may produce uneven or biased outcomes unless they are properly evaluated for fairness and responsible use.

For that reason, AI-supported Socratic pedagogy should be accompanied with transparency, bias auditing, and human oversight, especially in high-stakes educational contexts (Ahmed et al., 2025; Baldwin et al., 2025; WJARR, 2025).

### **B- Quality assurance and educational efficacy assessment in digital Socratic contexts**

Quality assurance in digital Socratic contexts needs to take a thorough look at how technology facilitates meaningful discussions in learning.

It should also examine how effective education is by looking at engagement levels, knowledge retention, and the evolution of critical thinking skills. Plus, it's vital to verify that everyone has equitable access and to confirm that AI-driven Socratic dialogue genuinely leads to transformative learning experiences (Aswathy & Nair, 2024, pp.60-79).

**C- Models for sustainable, ethically grounded technological integration in legal education**

- ✓ ***Integrated AI Literacy and Ethics Framework:*** Integrating sustainable technology into legal education implies we need to integrate AI literacy into the core curriculum while simultaneously emphasizing strong ethical underpinnings. This technique helps pupils strengthen their critical thinking skills.
- ✓ ***Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Ecosystems:*** Effective technology integration actually rests on a step-by-step adoption approach that's rooted in effective teaching practices, solid institutional support, and teamwork with partners.
- ✓ ***Sustainability-Conscious Legal Methodology:*** Sustainable integration asks for certain basic adjustments in how we approach legal methodology. It's time to shift away from traditional, inflexible methodologies and embrace interdisciplinary frameworks that focus on systems thinking.

**Conclusion:**

The Socratic Method is still at the heart of what legal education strives to achieve: cultivating critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and good professional judgment. Adapting it for the digital age isn't just achievable; it's also a valuable task (Thanaraj & Gledhill, 2023).

However, it does require for a careful approach that keeps the spirit of the method intact while also acknowledging the potential and problems that technology brings.

Reframing the Socratic method for legal education in the digital age involves integrating traditional case-dialogue with technology-enabled, client-focused and skills-oriented learning. Digital platforms allow Socratic questioning to continue asynchronously, expand participation, and support multimodal interaction in online and hybrid classrooms (Abrams, 2015).

Scholars propose "online Socrates" models that soften classroom hierarchies, promote inclusion, and better simulate contemporary, tech-mediated legal practice. Such redesign aims to preserve rigorous critical dialogue while leveraging digital tools to develop practice-ready, research-savvy, and collaborative law graduates (Harey, 2024).

The most effective solutions will presumably blend:

- ✓ *Engaging digital conversations that are rooted in humanistic principles,*
- ✓ *Smart use of AI as a helpful tool in teaching rather than a full-on replacement,*
- ✓ *A clear commitment from institutions to ensure fair access and inclusive practices,*
- ✓ *Ongoing faculty training those balances teaching theory with tech skills, and*
- ✓ *Continuous assessment of how students are learning and growing professionally.*

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