



Training the 21st century Nigerian lawyer for the emerging world

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Abstract

In this global era, the nature of legal practice has been transformed from the traditional ways to modern day practice that cut across jurisdictions. It then follows that the training of modern-day legal practitioner should also undergo transformation starting from the type of training we give, mode of dispensing knowledge (teaching), to the relevance of what we teach in today's world considering technological development and globalisation.

Legal education and training should therefore take into consideration not only a particular society but the ever-evolving world and its attendant development. In line with the foregoing, the art of training lawyers should apart from teaching the law, jurisprudence, ethics, culture and practice, cultivate a viable means of transmitting the requisite knowledge while taking into consideration the attendant global and societal needs.

This paper looks at the training of lawyers in Nigeria, the methods, modules its merits and demerits and tries to suggest that incorporating more technology into teaching law in the law faculties and law school curriculum will produce lawyer that are better trained especially considering globalization, technological developments and societal needs.

Keywords: 21st century Nigerian lawyer, global era

Introduction

Advances in medicine and technology have made it easy to find, in a society, persons of different generation living, and at times even working together. It is now very common to find in an office persons from 5 different generations, that is, traditionalists/veterans (born between 1928 and-1945), Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X, (born between 1965 and 1980), Millennial Generation or Generation Y the internet generation, (born between 1981 and 1996.) and Generation Z or iGen (born between 1997-2010) working together. Each of these groups, because of the period in which they were born, have issues (legal and otherwise) peculiar to them. Laws are often enacted, amended, or even repealed to, as much as practicable, tackle issues in a society bearing in mind the different generations therein all in an effort to maintain order and for the protection of all the citizens.

The structure, common occurrences and dynamism of transactions in a society are often the determinant of the structures and facilities established therein to take care of needs of the citizens. Every system established by the relevant authority is therefore set up with the ambition of meeting not just the immediate and future goals of the society but the desire of being able to be at par with or even better than members of other societies. Countries therefore make policies with their citizens in mind but the entire world in their proverbial rear mirror.

The formal training of lawyers in Nigeria has a short history as it was started in the 1960s following the recommendation of the 'Committee on the Future of Nigerian Legal Profession' 1959 (Unsworth Committee) ^[1]. This Committee was set up to make recommendations for the future of the legal profession in Nigeria. Some of its recommendations are that Nigeria should establish its own system of legal education, establishment of a Faculty of Law at the University College, Ibadan, and subsequently at any other university, Establishment of the Council of Legal

Education, the qualification for admission to practice law should be a degree and the establishment of the Nigerian Law School ^[2]. All these recommendations have been realized and have thus far, served the country as they have been utilized in the provision of the requisite qualitative legal education that have serve, and very well too, persons that belong in the 5 generations discussed above.

The challenge for legal education in Nigeria is the arrival of the 21st century with the attendant advancement in technology and communication that has made the entire world a global village thereby expanding the jurisdiction or frontiers for the practice of law by a Nigerian lawyer. One appreciates the impact of previous scholarly plans, curriculum and structures, there is the need, in the light of our current realities of globalization, artificial intelligence, social media, changing concept of goods, services and property, to cultivate a law curriculum that will not only embrace globalization, technological development and advancements but also help put our lawyers at par with their colleagues from other climes.

Some areas that have necessitated a review of our training modules are:

This article will look at issues that have necessitated the desire for the introduction or even an overhaul of law scholarship and training so as to better equip the next generation for the 21st century. Some of these issues are:

a. Globalization: the world is now a 'global village' principally because people are able to interact and transact faster and more seamlessly using advance devices and facilities that are now more readily available ^[3]. Devices such as phones, computers with the use of the internet have made it easy for people to keep in touch people in different continents and time zones, and some time many people, in different locations, can meet at the same to transact business or even commit crimes. Although intercontinental

transactions are not new, the internet and such similar have given them an inconceivable boost. Paradoxically, the technologies that have made human interactions and business transactions easy and thereby developing not just the individuals concerned but also economies of countries, have also made it easy and attractive for local and international criminal activities to be carried out.

One appreciates the fact that the practice of law, save in exceptional cases or with special permission, is jurisdictional, that is, a lawyer practices his craft in the jurisdiction where he is trained, one cannot rule out the possibility of practicing after the shores of Nigeria. It is common knowledge that a major key to surviving in this 'global village' world is being open to and willingness to not just learn but embrace emerging and areas of law, practice and issues that globalization had thrust, not just our country but the world at large^[4]. There is therefore the need to overhaul the curriculum of the 21st century lawyer, right from the universities and ensure that it is not restricted to just our local laws and practices but should, as much as is practicable, include that of other jurisdictions; especially that of more advanced countries and of countries closest to us. This will, apart from equipping our upcoming lawyers for not just our local jurisdiction, will make it easier for them to venture into practice in other jurisdictions.

b. Technology: Technological advancement has led to the automation of some legal processes which in turn, have made for, not just faster a dispensation of justice but near seamless avenue for the perfection of instructions and transaction by anyone that is desirous and that has internet connection and the relevant gadget. There are legal self-help sites, offshore legal vendors, virtual assistants, legal documents preparers, legal blogs that people can access and consult should the need arise. It is now easy for legal relationship to be cultivated, nurtured and any brief in relations therein, perfected online. A survey conducted by the Harris Poll at the request of Your Lawyers Online, showed that 69% of people with legal problems patronize online legal service providers instead of going to see an attorney^[5]. These options have, apart from making legal services accessible, been avenues for getting cheaper and faster needed help. According to its 2012 IPO filing, LegalZoom, legal services provider made \$156 million in revenues with a \$12 million profit margin in 2011^[6] and that projected for the full year ending December 2022, is in the range of between \$650 million and \$660 million^[7]. Growth in the online legal services has been fueled by factors like increase in the demand for accessible and affordable legal services, the development of new low-cost business models and improvements in technological capabilities and market liberalization^[8].

Looking at the above statistics and projected earnings of just one of the millions of online legal services providers makes common sense to advocate for expansion of the curriculum in law programs to include courses that would expose students to ways in which they can provide services online. Most of the courses taught in our law faculties do not take cognize of the fact that the world has changed so much so that technology drives almost everything. Technology has also changed how information and documents are kept, archived and destroyed. Although the physical (cardboard file) has not been totally done away with, a lot of law firms have embraced the virtual filling and storage system. Many

law offices now have their 'files' in the computer system with password (not the traditional file cabinet) to protect them from unauthorized access. Copies of such files could also be kept in cyberspace using mechanism such as googledrive, dropbox, onedrive and icloud. Cloud Computing or —"Software as a Service" (SaaS) is another recent technological innovation in law office practice. It is the storage of an organization's data on the Internet in a server provided by an independent data center that is a separate organization from the client organization^[9]. Some lawyers even store client data, financial records, legal documents, and other information on the Internet using cloud computing^[10], rather than in servers located on their premises. It is obvious, from what has been enumerated here, that there is an urgent need to include courses that will help prepare the next generation of Nigerian lawyers for practice in the 21st century world. The 21st century Nigerian lawyer must therefore not only be educated and trained in elementary ICT such as typing on the computer, sending emails), but on how to apply technological innovations to enhance legal service delivery as this will help not just him in his practice but assist in the general administration of justice. Training should continuously be updated and reviewed as that will help keep us abreast with the ever-evolving world.

Although the Nigerian law industry was slow in embracing technology, this has changed so much so that apart from using their devices 'on-the-go' some law firms have websites through which they project what they do, post articles they have written, conferences and seminars they have attended or organised, etc. Some firms even conduct businesses via video conferencing and by that are able to render their services to clients within and outside the country. Even as focus is made on acquisition of IT, it is important that it is not used unthinkingly so that the facilities do not detract students from learning. Technology is an aid to the learning process. A significant impact of the development of IT for learning is its facilitation of active, students centered learning and easy nurturing of research and analytical capability.

c. Social Media and Networking: Social networking is changing the way a lot of businesses are being run. Communications and infomercials that used to be very expensive because of the need to pay for newspaper space, buy prime television slots or airtime from a radio station can now be done by simply uploading a status update on social media platforms and this can reach more people and at a faster rate and at a fraction of what it would have cost using the other medium.

Social medium platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram have given a lot of people platforms on which they air their views, reaching a large audience. People have used the opportunities provided by these platforms to fight for social justice, refugee rights, women and children's rights, etc. Hashtags created on Twitter, such as #bringbackourgirls^[11] was created and is still being used to keep the plight of the young secondary school girls abducted by Boko Haram from Government Girls Secondary School, Cibok, Borno State in the world's consciousness. Another hashtag that was used in the fight against police brutality was #endSARS^[12] and #sorosoke^[13]. The agitations behind these hashtags spread fast because of the use of social media platforms and handles

An appreciable number of legal practitioners have keyed into the use of social media to transmit information. Some law offices advertise for staff, zoom meetings, Webinars on some of these social media platforms or on their website. It is refreshing to see that the Nigerian court has even accepted the effect that social media has on our everyday life as was illustrated by the Taraba State High Court when it ordered the service of court process be done via social media.^[14] Materials obtained through social media can also be used in cases and could even be the foundation of the chain of events that led to the institution of the matter. A status updates can also be adjudged defamatory and appropriate punishment given. A recent example which went viral on the social media was the case against a social activist, Mr. Ibrahim Garba Wala^[15]. Mr. Wala was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment by Justice Yusuf Halilu of the High Court of the FCT for defamation, and inciting the public against Malam Abdullahi Muhammad, the Executive Chairman of National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON)^[16]. The inciting and defamatory materials were posted on Mr. Wala's facebook page. Social media can also be a means for advertising the lawyers' services especially so considering that the legal practitioners in Nigeria are no longer prohibited from advertising their services provided the content of such advert is fair and proper in all the circumstances; and complies with the provisions of the Rules^[17]. There is therefore the need to educate lawyers on social media the profitable ways of using them and especially especially behaviors thereon that may be contrary to the ethics of the legal profession

d. Video Conferencing: The use of video conferencing in teaching and legal practice can be achieved through utilisation of applications like Zoom, Goggle Meet, Microsoft Team, Skype^[18] and a host of others. Video Conferencing holds a lot of promise in teaching and research, especially for the injection of international and comparative flavor in the curricula as guest speakers, from different locations and jurisdictions share resources, knowledge and experiences from their base. It could be used to create a global classroom for students from several institutions to participate in the same course, through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Perhaps this facility holds even more promise for students and academics in developing countries to share resources with their colleagues in better endowed regions without them having to travel. Its use will therefore facilitate a better understanding of the various legal models and standards that exist elsewhere.

The major issues in the deployment of ICT for learning and teaching in Nigeria are the financial and technical resources required to deploy and maintain them. Apart from the issues of commitment, financial handicap be the reason why only a few university law faculties and the Nigerian Law School have limited IT infrastructure, at the time of writing this paper. It was heartwarming and a ground breaking feat when the Nigerian Law School conducted an entire session's lecture of about 18 weeks, using the Google Classroom during the 2020 COVID lockdown. Students were therefore not disadvantaged nor shortchanged because of the lockdown because lectures went on. This was done with help of video conferencing applications.

e. Artificial Intelligence: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is "the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages^[19]. AI, refers to computer software and systems that do not just do tasks they have been programmed for in advance, they actually *learn* as they go, improving their performance through feedback. These programs can quickly learn to complete data-intensive tasks that were previously relegated to bored and weary humans. By recognizing patterns in the relationships between words or data points, computers learn how to identify relevant information, recognize mistakes and spot inconsistencies—all faster, and usually better, than humans do^[20]. For example, through AI software, proof reading of documents is easier and faster. Lawyering work is more about writing/reading lengthy documents in order to analyse situations. It takes massive time to analyze and then there is the monotony, boredom and frustration felt by humans who are trying to go through such a task, and the ever-increasing need for speed in response to client, court and regulatory agency demands^[21]. An AI software, can, in less than a minute, find and fix errors in documents that a human being would painstakingly identify in hours. Other advantages of AI include:

- review of documents for discoverable or otherwise relevant information, generally referred to as technology-assisted review (TAR).
- legal research through automated searches of a universe of case law and statutes.
- contract and legal document analysis.

The legal profession is a conservative one that, it tries as much as it possible to, maintain traditional ways of doing things generation after generation. Artificial Intelligence have been introduced in medical sciences^[22]. In medicine, for example, robots using AI have been used in diagnosing patients, end-to-end drug discovery and development^[22]. It was not lack of staff that necessitated the use of AI but the need for an 'expert' that would work with precision. Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are already transforming the work of lawyers and law firms in many ways and there are enormous opportunities for the future. It is therefore, important to, in this 21st century, acquaint lawyers with the emerging new legal discipline of Artificial Intelligence Law in order to sensitize them on the advantages of AI in the practice of law. It is time for the Nigerian legal practitioners to be introduced to and accept the use of Artificial Intelligence as this will help transform the way we currently work and, especially, the way profession is viewed^[23].

f. Moot and Mock Trial Training: The need for practical legal training from the university to law school cannot be overemphasized. The law student needs to be trained and prepared for practice in local and international litigation, arbitration and mediation. Moot and Mock trial programs are avenues for the students to gain valuable training and exposure to the rudiments of advocacy^[24]. It is disheartening to state here that a many faculty of law do not take Mock and Moot Trials seriously. Often times arrangements for any such presentation is left to the either the class representative of the class presenting of the Law Student Society's officials. That should not be so especially since a majority of law students in Nigeria choose to be

litigation lawyers after their Call to Bar. It is therefore humbly suggested that Mock and Moot Trial training should be an integral part of legal education so should be commenced as optional in the 1st year of study and compulsory from the 3rd year and this should be rigorously supervised by the faculties to ensure full participation by all students. There should also be a synergy between the universities and the Nigerian Law School so the moot and mock training at the Law School will be a continuum of what was done at the university. The National University Commission (NUC) and the Council of Legal Education (CLE) should therefore ensure that universities offering degrees in law have facilities such as court rooms, rehearsal venues and halls for such activities.

g. Externship Program and Legal Training - The externship programme (where law school students are posted to courts and law firms to gain practical experience for some weeks) should be introduced at the universities. The externship programme exposes these aspirants to the Bar to how law offices are run, and they get the opportunity to see first-hand, how court processes, probate forms, incorporation documents, etc are prepared and filed. In view of the logistics and man-power required for this, it is recommended that- a) it be undertaken only by students in their 400 level of study; b) that the acceptance and mentoring of such students (particular number for a particular duration) be added to the conditions to be satisfied before the conferment of the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria ^[25] and that of a Notary Public ^[26], c) that the faculties and the Law School carry out impromptu but regular visit to law firms and courts so as to ensure that all participants take this exercise seriously.

h. Clinical Legal Education: is a progressive educational ideology and pedagogy that is most often implemented through the university faculties. Clinical Legal Education programs offer classroom simulation lessons based on real-life cases and/or clinic experience involving interaction with real clients and are often conducted under the supervision of experienced law clinicians and legal practitioners. Law clinics are progressive because their programs are interactive, hands-on and promote learning by doing ^[27]. The establishment of Law Clinics should be taken as seriously as the establishment of the faculty's law library. This has been the desire of stakeholders in the profession as it was even recommended for the Nigerian Law School by the Council of Legal Education Committee on the Review of Legal Education in Nigeria in its report submitted on 29th July 2004 to the effect that:

“law faculties and the Nigerian Law School should as a matter of urgency introduce clinical legal education and that ‘the faculties are required to provide appropriate facilities, such as clinical consultation rooms...’ ^[28]

Moving forward, it is will not be enough to have faculties where teachers do all the work and examine students on things, they had little or no contribution to. It is only when we have the full participation of the law students will we be able to produce lawyers that can contribute to national development that will bring about the much needed economic and social changes.

i. Teaching the Laws: Law training is basically aimed at instilling 2 major components of the profession; these are

the exploration of legal knowledge and skills to real life situations in a quest for justice and instilling professional ethics and principles. The role of the law teacher, apart from teaching basic jurisprudence, is to guide the students to the critical thinking, analysis and deduction required in the profession. The task that Nigerian law teachers perform can best be described as law information delivery. This is because the typical teaching process in a law classroom often happens this way- the lecturer comes to class, does most of the talking and in the process passes on his wealth of knowledge antics and experiences to an ‘adoring’, mostly absent-minded and often not ready to engage students. Some of the students are even resentful of the time some teachers take to explain things because they are more interested in being guided to the proverbial ‘areas of concentration’ for examinations purposes. Some lecturers provide study materials which may comprise of the textbook they or their cronies had written or some ‘hand-outs’ that are tacitly made compulsory for students to purchase. The entire learning experience is teacher- centered with minimal (often forced) participation from students. This system of teaching does not stimulate the students thought process as they just sit and expect to be spoon fed by the teacher, then examined in the areas they had either been directed or restricted to or where he had emphasized or dwelt on in the course of teaching. There is a need for a shift from what obtains now to that which will return the teacher in his position of a guide and facilitator prepared to impart knowledge by using real life situations with the aim of highlighting legal issues thus stimulating the students thought process to that expected of a 21st century legal practitioner.

This can be done by the introduction of a step-by-step problem generating and-solving system that should comprise of teaching, simulation and role-playing presentation by the students. Every lecture should, as much as is possible and practicable be a combination of the teaching of legal principles and some role-playing and simulation based on the topic taught. The teaching segment should therefore have a set of predetermined learning outcome. Incorporating role plays into the learning process, would, apart from making the students use their imagination to portray the possible scenario (capturing the legal issue involved) make them engage in some research so as to find possible legal solutions. This will, aside from breaking the monotony of listening to one person speak throughout the lecture, give the students the opportunity to share with their peers their ideas, opinions and skills. Organizing ad participating in role plays will also help students take up some responsibilities as they are no longer waiting to be spoon fed with every little detail by the lecturer as they now have contributions to make to the learning sessions. At the end of the presentation feedbacks in the form of questions should be taken and answered and clarifications made in areas that are fuzzy so as to explain or expound on issues that were still not clear.

Some advantages of this teaching process are:

- a. It will help students visualize and better appreciate the topic and this will assist them in developing the ethical and social skills essential for law practice.
- b. It is a practical way of learning as it helps the student learn by doing. It also encourages the evaluation and synthesis of the subject matter.

- c. It makes learning fun because student participation makes them more open to contributing to the learning process. Participation can also help the students in the long-term because it involves the initiation and execution of projects which will be invaluable in their professional life.
- d. Simulation and role-playing help the students in developing their research, text analyzing, and presentation and argumentation skills.

Re-structuring legal training system in Nigeria must also look at the courses being taught at our various institutions. This is to ensure that the courses and topics are still relevant in the 21st century world. This therefore means that courses or procedures that are out of touch with the present reality should be discontinued while those that are necessary (even where they are not commonly practiced or found in our climate) should be taught.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussions: Law training that would be beneficial to the students and the society at large should move with the times. It should embrace the global nature of the world and the fact that almost every aspect of human endeavor is somewhat determined by technological development. Lawyers should therefore be equipped for it. Practical learning mechanism such as the mock and moot courts, the externship programmes (comprising of the court and law office) and clinical legal education be made integral and compulsory parts of law curriculum starting at the university.

The fundamentals of what lawyers do have not changed much. What has changed dramatically is how legal services are delivered. The development of the internet and globalization has expended the lexicon of the profession. Nigerian lawyers (old, new and future) must be ready to collaborate with, not just other lawyers from other jurisdictions but with technologists, scientists, business owner and expert in fields relevant to their area of practice. Legal education, should as much as is possible, be structured and taught in ways that will equip lawyers for the reality they presently and will continue to face.

The points raised and discussed above, amongst so many others, need to be addressed if the Nigerian trained lawyer is to succeed in the profession in the 21st century.

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