



Reimagining legal education in Ghana: From access to excellence for justice and national development

Abubakari Najimu¹, Halid Abdul-Rauf², Mohammed Aziz³

¹ Deputy Registrar, Department of Private Law, Tamale Technical University, Tamale, Ghana

² Director of Legal Affairs, Registry Department of Private Law, Tamale Technical University, Tamale, Ghana

³ Director of Human Resources, Registry Department of Private Law, Tamale Technical University, Tamale, Ghana

Abstract

Across Africa, the reform of legal education has emerged as an urgent policy priority. Ghana's experience exemplifies the paradox of expanded access without a corresponding commitment to excellence. Despite the proliferation of law faculties and unprecedented enrolment, the quality of legal training remains inconsistent, thereby undermining justice delivery, governance, and economic progress. Based on an analysis of secondary evidence from Ghana and comparative Commonwealth jurisdictions, this article contends that legal education reform must pivot from access to excellence. It identifies systemic deficiencies—curriculum obsolescence, inadequate practical exposure, pedagogical inertia, and fragmented regulation—and situates these within broader African trends. The paper proposes an evidence-based reform framework, calling for harmonised regulation, modern curricula, robust clinical legal education, and strategic investment in faculty and infrastructure. This article contends that excellence is not merely an aspirational goal but an indispensable condition for the rule of law and national development.

Keywords: Legal education, Ghana, reform, clinical legal education, access to justice, rule of law, Africa, national development

Introduction

Legal education constitutes the intellectual and institutional foundation of any nation's justice system, democratic order, and rule of law. It is the primary mechanism through which the legal profession reproduces itself, transmits normative values, and cultivates the analytical, ethical, and advocacy skills necessary for the administration of justice. The quality of a country's lawyers, therefore, determines not only the efficacy of its courts but also the competence of its lawmakers, the integrity of its public institutions, and the legitimacy of its governance structures. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2024) and the World Bank (2022) ^[20] observe, legal education plays a pivotal role in shaping the broader human capital architecture required for sustainable development and democratic consolidation.

In Ghana, however, persistent weaknesses in the quality and structure of legal education have constrained the nation's democratic and economic trajectory. Although the liberalization of tertiary education since the early 2000s led to an unprecedented expansion of Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) programmes, this quantitative growth has not translated into qualitative improvement. The proliferation of private and public law faculties has increased access and geographical reach, yet the systemic deficiencies—ranging from obsolete curricula and traditionalist pedagogy to fragmented regulation and inadequate practical exposure—have collectively undermined the attainment of professional excellence. The result is a widening gap between academic instruction and the professional, ethical, and policy-oriented competencies demanded by the modern legal marketplace.

From a jurisprudential standpoint, the health of a legal system depends upon the continuous renewal of its intellectual foundations. A well-trained legal community ensures the development of coherent jurisprudence,

promotes access to justice, and sustains the legitimacy of constitutional democracy (Dakas & Dakas, 2019) ^[6]. Conversely, where legal education fails to keep pace with social, technological, and economic change, the law itself stagnates. In Ghana, the disconnect between legal education and societal realities has diminished the profession's responsiveness to emerging issues such as digital governance, environmental justice, and commercial arbitration—areas central to national development and international competitiveness.

These challenges are not unique to Ghana. Across Africa, the legal education crisis exhibits similar structural features: overcrowded classrooms, lecture-based instruction, outdated doctrinal focus, and weak regulatory coherence (Agomor, 2023; Abdulai, 2021) ^[1, 2]. In Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania, comparable deficiencies have provoked comprehensive reforms aimed at improving competence, ethics, and employability. For instance, Nigeria's Council of Legal Education introduced multi-campus models and continuous assessment mechanisms to decentralize access and enhance capacity (Ayua, 2001) ^[3], while Kenya's *Legal Education Act* (2012) created a harmonized regulatory structure linking academic and professional training (Kenya Council for Legal Education, 2020) ^[12]. Similarly, Tanzania's Legal Sector Reform Programme emphasized practical training and professional ethics as prerequisites for bar admission. These comparative experiences reveal that systemic transformation—rather than ad hoc interventions—is essential to restore public trust and align legal education with developmental priorities.

Ghana thus stands at a critical juncture. The country must shift from a narrow emphasis on access—measured primarily by enrolment figures and the proliferation of law faculties—to a more holistic paradigm of excellence anchored in quality assurance, innovation, and

accountability. This requires reconceptualizing legal education as a public good central to democratic governance, economic modernization, and social justice. Reform efforts must transcend bureaucratic expansion to establish an integrated, evidence-based model of legal training that produces not only technically competent lawyers but also ethically grounded and socially responsive legal professionals capable of advancing constitutionalism and national development.

This article critically synthesizes contemporary literature, empirical data, and institutional reports to examine how deficiencies within Ghana's legal education ecosystem undermine access to justice, weaken governance, and constrain economic growth. It employs a comparative analytical framework, drawing lessons from reform experiences in other African and Commonwealth jurisdictions. The objective is to propose a reform blueprint that situates excellence at the heart of legal education policy.

The paper proceeds as follows:

Part 2 identifies evidence-based deficiencies in Ghana's legal education system, highlighting institutional, curricular, and regulatory gaps.

Part 3 analyses the broader consequences of these deficiencies for justice delivery, governance, and national development.

Part 4 draws comparative insights from other jurisdictions—specifically Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and select Commonwealth models—to contextualize potential pathways for reform.

Part 5 concludes with a detailed framework for transforming Ghana's legal education from a system focused on access to one committed to excellence, competence, and societal relevance.

Evidence-Based Deficiencies in Legal Education

Ghana's legal education system exhibits several entrenched structural and institutional deficiencies that collectively impede the attainment of excellence. These weaknesses are interrelated, spanning entry barriers, curricular content, pedagogy, professional training, and governance frameworks. A rigorous, evidence-based diagnosis of these challenges is essential for understanding the roots of the current crisis and designing sustainable reform strategies.

1. The Professional Bottleneck

The persistent entry barrier to professional training remains one of the most contentious and legally significant challenges in Ghana's legal education landscape. The General Legal Council (GLC), acting under the *Legal Profession Act, 1960 (Act 32)*, exercises statutory authority over admission to professional legal training through the Ghana School of Law (GSL). However, the GSL's centralized "single-gate" model has become a structural bottleneck, restricting the progression of LL.B. graduates to professional qualification.

Empirical data from the GLC indicate that pass rates for the GSL's entrance examinations have often fallen below 25% in recent years, effectively excluding thousands of graduates annually from advancing to the bar (GLC, 2024). Critics argue that this model—anchored in limited institutional capacity rather than objective professional standards—creates an artificial scarcity of lawyers, raising fundamental

questions about fairness, transparency, and administrative justice. Indeed, multiple petitions before Parliament and the Supreme Court (e.g., *Justice for All Ghana v. GLC, 2021*) have challenged the legality of this centralized model, alleging inconsistency with the constitutional right to education under Article 25 of the *1992 Constitution*.

Comparatively, other African jurisdictions have addressed similar constraints through structural reforms. Nigeria's Council of Legal Education responded to capacity deficits by establishing regional campuses and modular assessment systems, thereby expanding access without compromising quality (Ayua, 2001)^[3]. Kenya's Council for Legal Education adopted outcome-based accreditation tied to university performance indicators, ensuring decentralization alongside consistent national standards (Kenya CLE, 2020)^[12]. Ghana's continued reliance on a single-institution model reflects an outdated approach that undermines equity, social mobility, and the broader objectives of democratizing access to the legal profession.

2. Curriculum Irrelevance and Outdated Content

The curriculum of Ghana's LL.B. programs remains largely doctrinal and static, emphasizing black-letter law at the expense of practical, interdisciplinary, and technological competencies. Despite Ghana's rapid economic diversification and digital transformation, law faculties continue to prioritize traditional subjects—Contract, Tort, Criminal Law, and Constitutional Law—while neglecting critical emerging areas such as intellectual property, fintech regulation, cybersecurity, climate change, and corporate governance.

This disjunction between academic instruction and the practical needs of modern legal practice has been repeatedly highlighted by employers, judges, and professional associations. The World Bank's *Skills Development Report* (2019) and the African Legal Education Consortium Review (2023) both underscore the urgent need to modernize curricula to reflect the demands of a globalized legal economy. In their current form, most Ghanaian LL.B. programs fail to produce graduates with the skills required for transnational legal practice or policy advisory roles.

Comparative experiences within the Commonwealth provide instructive models. The University of Cape Town's LL.B. curriculum integrates law and technology, social justice, and public interest litigation as core competencies, while Strathmore University in Kenya emphasizes experiential learning and interdisciplinary engagement with economics, sociology, and business management. The absence of such reforms in Ghanaian law schools perpetuates a cycle of professional under-preparedness, where graduates are theoretically informed but practically ill-equipped for the complexities of 21st-century legal work.

3. Pedagogical Inertia

Pedagogy—the method and philosophy of teaching—constitutes a critical yet underexplored dimension of Ghana's legal education crisis. The prevailing lecture-centric model is rooted in colonial-era legal instruction, emphasizing rote memorization and passive learning. Studies by Kwakye (2018)^[11] and Abdulai (2021)^[1] reveal that interactive or problem-based methods are rarely employed in Ghanaian classrooms, despite widespread recognition of their effectiveness in developing analytical and advocacy skills.

Globally, legal education has undergone a paradigm shift toward active learning models. These include case simulations, clinical placements, moot courts, negotiation workshops, and digital interactive tools—all of which promote applied understanding and critical thinking. The failure to adopt such methodologies in Ghana undermines not only the student learning experience but also the profession's long-term adaptability.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of Ghana's educational infrastructure. Although a few institutions transitioned to online instruction, most lacked robust digital platforms, trained faculty, or access to e-learning resources (Agomor, 2023) ^[2]. In contrast, jurisdictions such as South Africa and Canada institutionalized blended learning approaches that preserved academic rigor while enhancing accessibility. Without similar innovations, Ghana risks perpetuating a pedagogical model that is increasingly out of step with both technological and global educational standards.

4. Weak Clinical Legal Education

Clinical Legal Education (CLE) is internationally recognized as a cornerstone of professional legal training, combining academic study with experiential practice. CLE facilitates ethical formation, enhances advocacy skills, and directly contributes to access to justice by involving students in real-life client work. Despite its proven benefits, CLE remains marginal in Ghanaian legal education. Only a handful of universities maintain functional legal aid clinics, most of which are underfunded, understaffed, and poorly integrated into the academic credit system.

The Legal Resources Centre's Access to Justice Policy Brief (2022) ^[13] found that fewer than 20% of final-year law students in Ghana had participated in live-client clinics. The absence of formalized, credit-bearing CLE courses means that many graduates enter professional practice without ever having drafted pleadings, interviewed clients, or appeared in simulated proceedings. This deficiency is not merely pedagogical but constitutional—it constrains access to justice by limiting the availability of supervised pro bono services for vulnerable populations.

By contrast, universities such as the University of Lagos and Makerere University have institutionalized CLE as a mandatory, assessed component of their LL.B. curricula, supported through partnerships with bar associations and donor agencies. Empirical research from these institutions confirms that students who undergo structured clinical training demonstrate superior ethical reasoning, advocacy, and professional responsibility. Ghana's underinvestment in CLE thus perpetuates a dual deficit: inadequate practical training and weakened legal aid delivery.

5. Resource and Faculty Constraints

Resource inadequacies represent another structural impediment to excellence. Successive institutional audits by the National Accreditation Board (now Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, GTEC) have documented severe deficiencies in library resources, ICT infrastructure, and physical facilities. The staff–student ratio in several law faculties exceeds 1:60, far above the recommended standard for professional programs (GTEC, 2023). Faculty members often juggle heavy teaching loads with minimal research funding and limited opportunities for professional

development, resulting in low scholarly output and limited curriculum renewal.

The consequences are profound: when faculty members are overextended and under-resourced, they cannot integrate emerging legal developments—such as artificial intelligence, environmental litigation, or regional trade law—into their teaching and scholarship. Moreover, the lack of research funding undermines Ghanaian law faculties' contribution to evidence-based policymaking, thereby weakening the intellectual foundations of national legal reform. Addressing these constraints requires not only increased funding but also strategic investment in academic capacity-building, including research grants, sabbatical exchanges, and international collaborations.

6. Fragmented Regulation

Finally, the governance and regulatory framework of legal education in Ghana remains fragmented and incoherent. The dual oversight structure—comprising the GLC (responsible for professional standards) and GTEC (responsible for academic accreditation)—has produced overlapping mandates and policy inconsistencies. Universities control academic curricula, while the GLC regulates entry into practice, yet no institutional mechanism exists to ensure coordination between the two bodies. This bifurcated system has generated persistent tension, policy inertia, and confusion among stakeholders.

Since 2018, multiple reform proposals—including the *Legal Education Reform Bill* (2019)—have called for the establishment of a unified oversight mechanism to harmonize academic and professional regulation. However, implementation has been delayed due to bureaucratic resistance and institutional politics. Comparative analysis underscores the feasibility of integrated regulation: in the United Kingdom, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) oversees both academic and professional standards under a single competency-based framework (SRA, 2021). Similarly, South Africa's Legal Practice Council provides a hybrid model that balances university autonomy with centralized quality assurance. Ghana's fragmented regulatory architecture, by contrast, continues to impede accountability, innovation, and the pursuit of excellence.

Consequences for Justice and National Development

The deficiencies identified within Ghana's legal education system are not merely academic; they manifest concretely in the administration of justice, the quality of governance, and the broader trajectory of national development. Legal education functions as a social infrastructure for justice, governance, and economic order. When its foundations are weak, the entire justice system is destabilized. As the World Justice Project (2024) and UNESCO (2024) emphasize, an effective legal system requires a competent, ethically grounded, and well-distributed cadre of practitioners capable of safeguarding constitutionalism and facilitating equitable development.

The Ghanaian experience illustrates how deficiencies in training, regulation, and professional formation translate into institutional weaknesses—diminished judicial efficiency, weakened policy formulation, limited access to justice, and erosion of public confidence in the rule of law. The following subsections examine these consequences in detail.

1. Access to Justice

Access to justice is both a constitutional guarantee and a cornerstone of democratic governance. Article 12 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution affirms the equal protection of the law, while Article 19 enshrines the right to fair trial. Yet these guarantees are undermined by the structural bottlenecks of legal education and professional training.

Ghana's lawyer-to-population ratio, estimated at 1:6,000, is significantly below the international standard of approximately 1:1,500 (World Justice Project, 2024) ^[21]. This shortage disproportionately affects rural and peri-urban communities, where legal representation is scarce or nonexistent. The concentration of lawyers in Accra and a few regional capitals deepens the urban–rural justice divide, effectively restricting constitutional rights for large segments of the population.

The professional bottleneck perpetuated by the Ghana School of Law's centralized admission model has exacerbated this scarcity by artificially constraining the annual output of qualified lawyers. The resultant shortage inflates legal costs, prolongs litigation, and fuels public perceptions of elitism and inaccessibility within the legal profession. The *Rule of Law Index 2024* ranks Ghana below regional peers such as Kenya and South Africa on "Civil Justice Accessibility," reflecting these systemic barriers.

Comparative evidence demonstrates that countries which liberalize and decentralize professional legal training often experience significant gains in justice accessibility. Nigeria's multi-campus system and Kenya's outcome-based accreditation framework have not only expanded access but also improved the geographic distribution of practitioners (Ayua, 2001; Kenya CLE, 2020) ^[3, 12]. Without similar reforms, Ghana's constitutional promise of "justice for all" will remain aspirational rather than realized.

2. Economic and Investment Climate

The link between legal education and economic development is both direct and empirically substantiated. A well-trained legal workforce underpins economic confidence by ensuring predictable contract enforcement, efficient dispute resolution, and regulatory stability—conditions essential for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Conversely, weak legal capacity undermines investor trust and raises the cost of doing business.

Ghana's deficiencies in legal education have translated into limited specialization in key commercial fields such as energy law, corporate finance, and intellectual property. As a result, multinational investors often rely on foreign counsel for complex transactions, diminishing the local legal sector's competitiveness. According to the World Bank's *Doing Business Indicators* (2020), Ghana's contract enforcement index lags behind several regional peers, in part due to a shortage of well-trained commercial lawyers and arbitrators.

Comparative data reinforce this relationship. Empirical studies in Nigeria and Kenya demonstrate a positive correlation between improved legal capacity and FDI inflows (Dakas & Dakas, 2019) ^[6]. Nigeria's post-2010 reforms, which strengthened arbitration and commercial law education, coincided with a surge in foreign investment, while Kenya's restructured legal education system enhanced judicial efficiency in resolving business disputes. Ghana's failure to cultivate similar competencies undermines its

ability to leverage the law as an instrument of economic governance and sustainable development.

Furthermore, the absence of continuous professional development mechanisms for corporate and transactional lawyers constrains Ghana's integration into the global digital economy. The lack of expertise in areas such as fintech, data privacy, and international trade law hampers policy innovation and deters high-value investment in technology-intensive sectors.

3. Governance and Public Policy

The quality of governance in any constitutional democracy is closely linked to the competence and integrity of its legal professionals. In Ghana, many government's legal officers, legislative drafters, and judicial clerks are products of the same under-resourced educational system that struggles to balance doctrinal teaching with practical and ethical formation. Weak training in policy analysis, legislative drafting, and administrative law directly affects the quality of public decision-making and the coherence of statutory frameworks.

Civil society organizations, notably the Centre for Democratic Development–Ghana (CDD-Ghana), have repeatedly drawn attention to the nexus between legal education and governance quality (CDD-Ghana, 2024). Poorly trained drafters contribute to inconsistent legislation, ambiguous statutory language, and regulatory uncertainty—all of which undermine the predictability of law and the efficiency of public administration.

The rule of law cannot flourish where the legal profession lacks both analytical depth and moral grounding. Ethical lapses among lawyers and public officers often stem from a weak foundation in professional ethics and civic responsibility during legal training. This challenge has systemic implications: without a robust culture of legality and accountability, corruption thrives, public confidence erodes, and democratic consolidation stalls.

Comparatively, jurisdictions that embed ethics and policy analysis in legal curricula—such as South Africa and the United Kingdom—demonstrate greater legislative coherence and institutional integrity (South African Department of Higher Education, 2017; Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2021) ^[16, 17]. Ghana's fragmented and outdated system, by contrast, continues to produce technically literate but civically underprepared graduates.

4. Innovation and Adaptability

A dynamic and forward-looking legal system must evolve in response to technological, economic, and social change. Ghana's legal education system, however, has remained largely reactive rather than anticipatory. Law faculties have been slow to integrate contemporary subjects such as artificial intelligence, data protection, environmental governance, and digital evidence into their curricula. This inertia not only limits the profession's adaptability but also risks rendering Ghana's legal system obsolete in an era defined by technological disruption.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 underscores the imperative of digital literacy and innovation across all professional sectors, including law. Without modernization, Ghana's legal community risks marginalization within the global knowledge economy. The OECD (2022) further notes that "jurisdictions that fail to incorporate technological

competencies into legal training will face regulatory obsolescence and diminished competitiveness.”

In contrast, leading African institutions—such as the University of Cape Town and Strathmore University—have successfully mainstreamed law-and-technology courses, producing graduates capable of engaging with emerging digital governance frameworks. Ghana’s continued neglect of innovation threatens its ability to regulate fast-evolving domains such as fintech, data security, and cybercrime, all of which are critical to economic sovereignty and citizen protection. Innovation in legal education is therefore not a luxury but a developmental necessity. Without it, the legal profession risks losing relevance, and the justice system risks losing legitimacy in the face of societal transformation.

Comparative Insights: Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

Comparative experience across Africa and the wider Commonwealth offers critical lessons for reforming Ghana’s legal education system. While contextual differences in history, resources, and governance exist, common themes emerge: the centrality of regulatory coherence, curriculum modernization, pedagogical innovation, and stakeholder collaboration. The comparative method—long regarded as a cornerstone of legal development—provides a diagnostic lens through which Ghana can assess both pitfalls and best practices in the pursuit of excellence. The experiences of Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa illustrate the diversity of reform pathways, while global models such as those in the United Kingdom and Canada demonstrate the efficacy of competency-based and outcome-oriented frameworks.

1. Nigeria: Decentralization and Integrated Professionalism

Nigeria’s experience provides a pragmatic model of adaptive reform grounded in institutional decentralization and collaborative regulation. By the early 2000s, Nigeria faced a crisis strikingly similar to Ghana’s: rapid expansion of LL.B. programs, a proliferation of private universities, and inadequate professional training capacity. In response, the Council of Legal Education (CLE–Nigeria), acting under the *Legal Education (Consolidation, etc.) Act, Cap L10 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria*, implemented sweeping reforms between 2005 and 2015 (Ayua, 2001; Dakas & Dakas, 2019)^[3, 6].

Key innovations included the introduction of **multi-campus law schools** across the country—Lagos, Abuja, Enugu, Kano, Yenagoa, and Yola—thereby decentralizing professional training and alleviating the chronic congestion at the central institution. This structure democratized access, promoted regional equity, and enhanced administrative efficiency. The CLE also diversified its assessment modalities, introducing continuous evaluation alongside final bar examinations, and integrated **clinical and digital components** into the curriculum to enhance applied competence.

Furthermore, Nigeria’s reform model emphasized **tripartite collaboration** among the Council of Legal Education, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and donor agencies such as the Ford Foundation. These partnerships facilitated infrastructure development, faculty training, and curriculum modernization. While these reforms substantially increased throughput, ongoing challenges in maintaining uniform quality standards across decentralized campuses underscore

the need for robust monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms.

For Ghana, the Nigerian example demonstrates the feasibility of **expanding capacity without diluting standards**. Decentralization, when accompanied by unified assessment frameworks and continuous accreditation, can dismantle the “single-gate” bottleneck and promote equitable access to professional qualification.

2. Kenya: Harmonized Regulation and Market Alignment

Kenya’s reform experience is anchored in regulatory harmonization and competency-driven legal education. The enactment of the *Legal Education Act* (2012) established the Council for Legal Education (CLE–Kenya) as a unified regulatory body overseeing both academic and professional programs. This marked a deliberate shift from fragmented oversight toward an integrated framework that promotes consistency in quality assurance (Kenya CLE, 2020)^[12].

Under this system, all law schools—whether university-based or independent—must obtain accreditation from the CLE, which evaluates programs against national standards of competency, curriculum design, and ethical instruction. The Act also introduced regular compliance audits to ensure ongoing alignment with market and societal needs. Kenya’s LL.B. curriculum now incorporates alternative dispute resolution (ADR), information and communication technology (ICT) law, and legal ethics as core components, producing graduates who are both technically competent and ethically conscious.

Equally significant is Kenya’s emphasis on outcome-based education (OBE)—a pedagogical model that defines learning in terms of demonstrable skills and behaviors rather than rote knowledge. This aligns with global educational best practices and underscores the shift from knowledge transmission to competence formation. For Ghana, Kenya’s approach provides a model of how statutory reform can reconcile university autonomy with national accountability, ensuring that academic and professional standards evolve in tandem with labor market demands.

3. South Africa: Competency, Justice, and Social Responsiveness

South Africa’s post-apartheid transformation of legal education demonstrates how reform can be both a tool of inclusion and a vehicle for justice. The apartheid-era legal system, characterized by elitism and exclusion, necessitated a complete pedagogical overhaul to reflect the values of equity, diversity, and constitutionalism enshrined in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*.

In response, the Council on Higher Education initiated the *National Review of LL.B. Programmes* (2017), which redefined legal education around competency-based outcomes and social justice imperatives (South African Department of Higher Education, 2017). The review introduced compulsory community engagement, clinical legal education (CLE), and ethics training as integral curricular components. Law faculties were required to demonstrate how their programs contribute to constitutional transformation, gender equality, and public interest litigation.

Moreover, South Africa institutionalized continuous curriculum review, ensuring that courses remain aligned with emerging legal, technological, and socioeconomic

realities. This model highlights the synergy between academic freedom and public accountability: universities retain autonomy in curriculum design but must operate within a framework of measurable competencies and ethical outcomes.

For Ghana, South Africa's experience underscores the transformative potential of legal education when linked explicitly to the goals of social justice and national development. Reform should not merely produce lawyers; it should produce civic professionals capable of advancing constitutional democracy and human rights.

4. Global Standards: Competency-Based Professionalism

Beyond Africa, Commonwealth jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and Canada offer models of **outcome-based**, transparent, and decentralized legal education frameworks that could inform Ghana's reform trajectory. The United Kingdom's *Solicitors Qualifying Examination* (SQE), introduced by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) in 2021^[16], replaced fragmented qualification pathways with a standardized national examination based on clearly defined competency frameworks (SRA, 2021).

The SQE model combines flexibility with accountability: candidates may pursue multiple routes to qualification—university study, apprenticeship, or paralegal experience—provided they demonstrate mastery of prescribed competencies. This ensures inclusivity without compromising professional integrity. Likewise, Canada's Federation of Law Societies has harmonized accreditation across provinces through a National Requirement Framework, emphasizing core competencies such as ethical reasoning, legal research, and professional responsibility (Federation of Law Societies of Canada, 2019)^[17].

These global frameworks demonstrate that excellence in legal education is achievable through standardized national assessment, transparent evaluation metrics, and diverse learning pathways. They also highlight the role of technology in democratizing access through online bar preparation and competency tracking platforms. Ghana can adopt these principles by designing a national competency-based assessment regime, integrating technology into instruction, and decentralizing professional training within a unified quality assurance system.

5. Synthesis and Implications for Ghana

Across jurisdictions, successful reform initiatives share several common characteristics: (a) unified regulation, reducing institutional fragmentation; (b) competency-driven curricula, aligning legal training with societal needs; (c) experiential learning, embedding clinical and community-based practice; and (d) sustained investment in faculty and infrastructure. Importantly, each model recognizes legal education as a public good—a vital component of national governance and development rather than a purely academic pursuit.

For Ghana, adopting a context-sensitive blend of these approaches—Nigeria's decentralization, Kenya's harmonized oversight, South Africa's justice-oriented competency model, and the UK's transparent assessment regime—offers a coherent roadmap toward excellence. Reform must thus transcend rhetoric to institutionalize evidence-based policies that reconcile accessibility, quality,

and equity within a unified, forward-looking legal education system.

Toward A Framework for Reform

Empirical and comparative evidence across jurisdictions indicates that sustainable transformation in legal education depends upon coordinated, multi-level reform. Piecemeal interventions—whether curricular updates or sporadic infrastructure investment—are insufficient. Instead, reform must be **systemic**, addressing the governance, pedagogical, financial, and ethical dimensions that collectively define the quality of legal education. Drawing on lessons from Africa and the Commonwealth, this section proposes five interrelated priorities that together constitute a coherent framework for reforming Ghana's legal education system.

1. Harmonized Regulatory Framework

The cornerstone of reform must be the establishment of a unified Legal Education and Training Council (LETC) that merges the current fragmented oversight functions of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) and the General Legal Council (GLC). The LETC would operate as a statutory body empowered under a re-enacted *Legal Education Act*, consolidating academic accreditation, professional standards, and institutional quality assurance under a single regulatory authority.

Such a council should be representative and transparent. Its composition ought to include members from the judiciary, the Ghana Bar Association, accredited law faculties, civil society organizations, and the Ministry of Justice. The LETC's mandate should extend beyond accreditation to encompass strategic planning, data collection, and periodic performance evaluation, grounded in evidence-based metrics such as graduate employability, ethical compliance, and research output.

The council's work must be guided by the principles of transparency, inclusivity, and merit-based evaluation. Its regulatory model could draw from Kenya's Council for Legal Education (CLE) and the UK's Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), which combine centralized standard-setting with decentralized delivery. By ensuring coherence between academic curricula and professional qualification requirements, Ghana would achieve both accountability and flexibility—two pillars essential for sustainable excellence.

2. Curriculum Modernization

Curriculum reform is the substantive core of legal education renewal. The existing doctrinal and lecture-driven model must give way to a **competency-based, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented curriculum**. Modernization entails rethinking not only what is taught but how and why it is taught.

A 21st-century LL.B. program should balance foundational subjects with contemporary fields that reflect Ghana's developmental priorities. Core courses should include *Law and Technology*, *Environmental and Natural Resource Law*, *Corporate Governance*, *Intellectual Property*, and *Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)*. Equally critical is the integration of comparative and international perspectives, enabling Ghanaian students to engage with transnational legal norms governing trade, human rights, and regional integration.

Interdisciplinary modules linking law with economics, sociology, political science, and data analytics would foster

multidimensional reasoning. This shift aligns with the OECD's (2022) call for future-oriented legal education that cultivates problem-solving, digital literacy, and ethical reasoning. A reformed curriculum must also embed ethical formation throughout, treating professional responsibility not as a stand-alone course but as a continuous thread woven into all stages of legal training.

Periodic curriculum review—supervised by the proposed LETC and informed by labor market data—will ensure that legal education remains responsive to both domestic and global transformations.

3. Pedagogical Innovation

Reform cannot succeed without transforming pedagogy. Ghana must transition from the teacher-centered, lecture-based tradition inherited from colonial legal education toward a learner-centered, experiential model that fosters analytical independence and professional competence.

Faculty members should be trained in clinical and problem-based learning methodologies, incorporating case simulations, moot courts, negotiation and mediation workshops, and digital interaction tools. Continuous professional development for lecturers must become institutionalized, supported through peer mentoring, pedagogical training, and exchange programs.

Moreover, universities must invest in digital platforms and e-learning technologies to support hybrid instruction. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that resilience in education depends upon digital adaptability. Implementing blended learning models will widen access, especially for working professionals and students in remote areas, while maintaining academic rigor.

To sustain innovation, law faculties should institutionalize teaching evaluations and quality assurance audits linked to promotion criteria. A culture of pedagogical excellence requires incentives for creativity, collaboration, and reflective teaching practices. This approach aligns with South Africa's competency-based education reforms (2017) and the UK's outcome-based pedagogical frameworks (SRA, 2021).

4. Strengthened Clinical Legal Education

Clinical Legal Education must evolve from a peripheral initiative into a mandatory, credit-bearing, and professionally supervised component of every accredited LL.B. program in Ghana. CLE provides the bridge between theoretical instruction and practical lawyering, nurturing advocacy, ethics, and empathy—qualities essential for justice delivery in a democratic society.

The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the Legal Aid Commission, the Ghana Bar Association, and donor partners, should fund university-based law clinics that offer free legal services to marginalized communities. These clinics serve dual purposes: they provide students with hands-on experience while expanding access to justice for underrepresented groups.

To institutionalize CLE, accreditation standards should require every law faculty to demonstrate structured partnerships with public interest organizations, NGOs, or community legal aid centers. As evidenced by programs in Nigeria and Uganda, donor-funded CLE initiatives—when linked to formal academic credit—can produce measurable outcomes in ethical awareness and professional competence (Kwakyie, 2018; LRC, 2022)^[11].

Incorporating CLE will also help fulfill Ghana's constitutional obligation under Article 33(5) to ensure effective access to justice, transforming legal education from an elite pursuit into a public service mission.

5. Sustainable Funding and Faculty Development

Excellence in legal education is resource-intensive. Sustainable reform requires predictable, equitable, and diversified funding mechanisms. The Government of Ghana should allocate a dedicated line item within the higher education budget to support law faculties, prioritizing digital infrastructure, modern libraries, and competitive remuneration for academic staff.

In addition to public financing, law faculties should pursue public-private partnerships with law firms, professional bodies, and international organizations. Collaborative funding can support endowed chairs, research centers, and scholarship programs. Establishing a National Legal Education Endowment Fund, jointly managed by the LETC and the Ghana Bar Association, could provide long-term financial sustainability.

Faculty development must be central to this strategy. Competitive research grants, sabbatical exchanges, and participation in regional academic networks such as the *African Network of Law Deans (ANLD)* would strengthen scholarly capacity and foster innovation. Without investment in faculty excellence, reform efforts will remain superficial and unsustainable.

Conclusion

Ghana's legal education system stands at a historical crossroads. The pursuit of access without corresponding investment in quality has produced a paradoxical outcome: a growing pool of law graduates but a shrinking cadre of competent practitioners. The cumulative effect has been a weakening of justice delivery, erosion of professional ethics, and diminished public trust in the rule of law.

The evidence, drawn from Ghana and comparative jurisdictions, is unequivocal—systemic reform is not optional but imperative. Legal education is the foundation upon which the justice system, democratic governance, and economic progress rest. If the foundation is weak, the entire structure of governance falters.

Transforming legal education from access to excellence demands three interdependent commitments: political will, institutional coordination, and sustained investment. The path forward is clear. Ghana must:

1. Establish a harmonized regulatory framework through a unified Legal Education and Training Council.
2. Modernize curricula to align with global and national priorities.
3. Foster pedagogical innovation that promotes critical and ethical thinking.
4. Institutionalize Clinical Legal Education as a pillar of professional formation.
5. Ensure sustainable funding and faculty development as the engine of reform.

Excellence in legal education is not a privilege for the few; it is a constitutional and developmental necessity for the nation. The reform of legal education is thus integral to the broader project of national renewal—anchored in justice, accountability, and human development.

For Ghana, and indeed for many postcolonial legal systems, the journey from access to excellence begins not in the

courtroom but in the classroom. A robust, inclusive, and innovative legal education system is both the starting point and the sustaining force of the rule of law, democratic governance, and equitable national progress.

References

1. Abdulai AG. Legal education in Ghana: Challenges and prospects. *Ghana Law Journal*,2021;42(1):45–67.
2. Agomor E. Digitising legal education in Africa: Lessons from the COVID-19 experience. *African Journal of Legal Studies*,2023;16(2):112–135.
3. Ayua IA. Legal education in Nigeria: Past, present, and future (NIALS Monograph Series). Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 2001.
4. Centre for Democratic Development–Ghana (CDD-Ghana). Governance and legal sector performance report 2024. Accra: CDD-Ghana, 2024.
5. Council for Legal Education (Nigeria). Reform framework for Nigerian legal education: Decentralisation and competency development. Abuja: CLE, 2015.
6. Dakas CJD, Dakas MO. Rethinking legal education in Africa: A critical analysis. *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*,2019;27(2):234–258.
7. Federation of Law Societies of Canada. National requirement: Competency framework for entry to the profession. Ottawa: FLSC, 2019.
8. Ghana Bar Association (GBA). Annual report on legal education and professional ethics. Accra: GBA, 2023.
9. Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). Accreditation and quality assurance reports on law faculties in Ghana. Accra: GTEC, 2023.
10. General Legal Council (GLC). Annual report on professional legal education and entrance examinations. Accra: GLC, 2024.
11. Kwakye JK. Clinical legal education in Ghana: Prospects and challenges. *University of Ghana Law Journal*,2018;30(1):1–20.
12. Kenya Council for Legal Education (CLE). Legal education standards and accreditation handbook. Nairobi: CLE, 2020.
13. Legal Resources Centre (LRC). Access to justice in Ghana: Policy brief. Accra: LRC, 2022.
14. Menkel-Meadow C. Why and how to study “transnational” law. *UC Irvine Law Review*,2014;1(1):97–122.
15. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Legal education and skills for the future of work. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022.
16. Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). Solicitors Qualifying Examination: Competence statement and assessment specification. London: SRA, 2021.
17. South African Department of Higher Education and Training. National review of LL.B. programmes: Final report. Pretoria: Government of South Africa, 2017.
18. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Transforming tertiary education for sustainable development: Policy brief for Africa. Paris: UNESCO, 2024.
19. World Bank. World development report 2019: The changing nature of work. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2019.
20. World Bank. Africa skills report 2022: Building human capital for a digital future. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022.
21. World Justice Project (WJP). Rule of law index: Ghana country report 2024. Washington, DC: World Justice Project, 2024.