

ENHANCING LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: REFLECTIONS ON COMPULSORY PARTICIPATION OF LAW TEACHERS IN STUDENT ADVOCACY PROGRAMMES AND THE IMPERATIVE FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Dr. Nasiru Mukhtar^{1*}, Ofure Bethel Inedia²

^{1*,2}FACULTY OF LAW UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA.

* **Correspondence:** Dr. Nasiru Mukhtar

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ABSTRACT: Developing an integrated model that would make it compulsory for teachers to participate in law students' moot court and other advocacy activities have become imperative due to growing need of active teacher supervision in students practical and mentoring. The challenge however has been the method of mainstreaming appropriate compensation for teachers as that will require extra workload. Drawing on the University of Abuja's experiences in Clinical Legal Education (CLE), this paper argues that compulsory teacher participation in advocacy programmes is both an educational and professional necessity. It examines how CLE transforms legal educators into practitioner-mentors, enriches students' practical learning, and enhances faculty development through global collaborations. Using the University of Abuja's model, anchored on faculty ownership, curriculum integration, and experiential learning, the paper highlights how such reforms nurture competent, ethical, and globally competitive graduates. It concludes that while conservatism and institutional inertia still challenge Nigeria's legal education, systemic curriculum redesign for knowledge, skills, and values remains the most sustainable

route to transforming both the law teacher and the future of legal education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Drawing from years of experience as Clinical Legal Education (CLE) teachers at the University of Abuja, where we have supervised law clinics, moot courts, and student advocacy initiatives, we strongly endorse the vision of compulsory participation for law teachers. This approach redefines educators not merely as conveyors of doctrine but as facilitators of justice-oriented learning, producing multidimensional benefits that extend far beyond monetary compensation.

In this reflection, we explore how mandatory teacher participation in advocacy programmes can strengthen faculties, inspire students, and reposition Nigerian legal education to meet global standards. We discuss the transformative impact of CLE on teachers, students, and institutions, highlighting the University of Abuja's distinctive contributions. We also consider the theoretical foundations of CLE, its African evolution, and the imperative of integrating it into Nigeria's law curriculum. The reflections culminate in a call for systemic reform to ensure that experiential legal education becomes a core, not peripheral, component of every law faculty's mission.

Notably, there is no better setting to discuss integrated models for teacher participation than the University of Abuja. Only a few months ago, Dr. Naisru Mukhtar, being the Director of Clinical Legal Education in the University of Abuja, had the privilege of attending the 125th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) in Baltimore; America's equivalent of NALT, where he exchanged ideas on Nigeria's CLE framework with Professor Ojukwu, SAN, a distinguished guest at the event. Those interactions reaffirmed that Nigeria's CLE initiatives have earned global attention and that our next challenge lies in institutionalising participation and integration across all faculties of law.

Conceptual and Contextual Background

CLE: Clinical Legal Education is an instructional approach that bridges legal theory and practice through interactive, experiential learning . Its theoretical foundations lie in hands-on learning; students learn best by doing; and in social justice education,

which positions law as a tool for societal transformation. Through clinics, simulations, and advocacy programmes, CLE exposes students to real-life legal problems, enabling them to develop analytical, ethical, and problem-solving skills within supervised environments.

CLE: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS:

Constructivist Learning Theory:

Constructivist learning theory posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experience, interaction, and reflection rather than passively receiving information from instructors. According to Jean Piaget, learning occurs as individuals assimilate new information into existing cognitive structures or accommodate by altering those structures to make sense of new experiences. Within the context of Clinical Legal Education (CLE), constructivism provides a strong philosophical foundation for learning by doing; students engage in authentic legal tasks such as interviewing clients, drafting documents, and participating in advocacy. These activities allow them to construct understanding through direct experience, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Law clinics, therefore, function as environments where learners can test hypotheses, challenge assumptions, and refine their legal reasoning through active participation and supervision.

Moreover, constructivism supports the pedagogical strategy of instructional aid and guided discovery, in which clinical supervisors act as facilitators who help students navigate complex legal issues while encouraging autonomy. Studies suggest that constructivist approaches promote deeper learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for competent legal practice. Through this lens, CLE becomes not merely a means of skill acquisition but a process through which students internalize legal principles and professional values by constructing their own understanding of law in action.

Experiential Learning Theory:

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), developed by David Kolb (1984), provides another theoretical foundation for CLE by emphasizing that knowledge emerges through the transformation of experience. Kolb conceptualized learning as a cyclical

process involving four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In clinical settings, this theory manifests when students engage directly with clients or simulated cases (concrete experience), reflect on their performance (reflective observation), connect experiences to legal doctrines or ethical frameworks (abstract conceptualization), and apply new insights to future cases (active experimentation). This cyclical model aligns naturally with CLE's focus on developing practice-ready lawyers capable of integrating theory with the realities of legal work.

Furthermore, ELT emphasizes reflective practice as a critical component of learning, transforming experience into actionable knowledge. Reflection enables law students to identify gaps in their reasoning, recognize ethical dilemmas, and adapt their professional behavior accordingly. In CLE programmes, structured reflection sessions, debriefings, and journal writing are often used to facilitate this process. The experiential learning framework thus ensures that clinical activities are not mere tasks but deliberate educational experiences that promote professional identity formation, ethical awareness, and adaptive expertise, key goals of contemporary legal education reform.

Social Justice Education Theory:

Social justice education theory underpins CLE's normative commitment to equity, fairness, and access to justice. This theoretical perspective argues that education should empower learners to challenge structural inequalities and engage in transformative social change. In the context of CLE, this means positioning law clinics not only as training grounds for future lawyers but also as instruments of social reform that serve marginalized and underrepresented populations. Clinical programmes embody this mission by providing free legal services, promoting human rights advocacy, and fostering civic responsibility among students. Through this engagement, students develop empathy, social consciousness, and a deeper understanding of how law can be both a tool of justice and oppression.

Additionally, social justice theory challenges the traditional exclusivism of legal education by emphasizing community engagement and the democratization of legal

knowledge. As studies have observed, clinical education rooted in social justice connects education to practice in ways that expand students' conception of lawyering beyond courtroom advocacy to include policy reform, mediation, and community empowerment. This approach reinforces CLE's dual objectives: to develop competent, ethical legal professionals and to advance access to justice as a core value of the legal system. By grounding CLE in social justice theory, legal education moves beyond skills training to embrace its transformative potential within society.

CLE METHODOLOGY

Clinical Legal Education (CLE) employs a methodology rooted in experiential and participatory learning, designed to bridge the persistent gap between legal theory and professional practice. CLE emphasizes "learning by doing" as a means for students to internalize legal principles through active engagement rather than passive reception. The methodology integrates theoretical instruction with real or simulated practice, enabling students to translate doctrinal knowledge into practical competence. Studies have shown that CLE operates through a dynamic cycle of experience, reflection, theory, and application, allowing students to acquire lawyering skills, such as interviewing, counseling, negotiation, and ethical reasoning, within a supervised and reflective environment. Central to this process is the role of supervision and feedback, which transforms experience into learning and develops the student's capacity for self-evaluation and professional judgment.

CLE methodology is inherently flexible, adapting to different institutional and social contexts through varied models of delivery. Frank Bloch identifies four principal models: **live-client clinics, simulation-based clinics, externships or field placements, and community legal education programmes.**

Live-client clinics are the most immersive, providing students direct responsibility for real clients under faculty supervision, thus promoting professional accountability and empathy. Simulation clinics, on the other hand, create controlled learning environments where students can practice lawyering skills such as advocacy and interviewing without the ethical and procedural constraints of real cases. Externships place students in courts, law firms, or NGOs, offering exposure to institutional

practice and mentoring by professionals. Finally, community legal education and Street Law programmes focus on public legal awareness, reinforcing CLE's social justice dimension and positioning law as an instrument for empowerment and civic engagement.

The combination of these models reflects the dual objectives of CLE: to produce competent, reflective legal professionals and to advance access to justice. By blending experience with guided reflection, CLE transforms students from passive learners into active participants in justice delivery. As studies have shown, this methodological integration not only enhances technical proficiency but also cultivates ethical awareness, social responsibility, and critical engagement with law's role in society. The CLE methodology and its varied models thus embody a holistic vision of legal education; one that prepares graduates for the realities of practice while grounding their professional identity in values of service, justice, and community.

CLE IN AFRICA

Clinical Legal Education (CLE) in Africa has evolved as a transformative instructional and social justice tool, reshaping legal education across the continent. The movement gained momentum in the early 1990s with pioneering efforts in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda. It arose largely in response to the inadequacies of traditional legal education, which had been criticised for its overemphasis on theory and neglect of practice, ethics, and societal relevance. The early African CLE initiatives were strongly influenced by the South African model, which sought to integrate experiential learning with a commitment to human rights and community service. In South Africa, the University of Natal and the University of the Witwatersrand were among the first institutions to establish law clinics as part of formal curricula, linking education to access to justice for the disadvantaged.

In Nigeria, the adoption of CLE was propelled by the Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI) in 2003, which championed the mainstreaming of clinical methods into law faculties. Through NULAI's advocacy, law clinics became

widespread, promoting practical training and civic responsibility among students. Similarly, East African universities, supported by regional networks like the Association of University Legal Aid Institutions of East Africa (AULAI-EA), have adopted CLE to strengthen public interest lawyering and human rights practice. The African CLE movement is thus characterised by a dual focus on skills training and social transformation; training lawyers who are not only competent but also socially conscious. Despite variations in institutional models, CLE in Africa reflects a shared commitment to decolonising legal education and aligning it with the lived realities of African societies.

A PAN-AFRICAN APPROACH

The Pan-African movement for CLE, supported by networks such as the Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI) and the Open Society Justice Initiative, sought to embed experiential learning within legal curricula. Nigeria has been at the forefront of this movement, yet many faculties still treat CLE as an extracurricular or elective programme rather than a core academic component.

A Pan-African approach to Clinical Legal Education envisions a collaborative framework that transcends national boundaries, uniting African law schools under shared values of social justice, inclusivity, and experiential learning. Such an approach recognises the common challenges of postcolonial legal education: rigid curricula, limited practical exposure, and the marginalisation of indigenous legal systems; and proposes regional cooperation as a means to overcome them. It calls for curriculum development, cross-border clinical exchanges, and joint advocacy initiatives that address continental concerns such as migration, environmental justice, corruption, and human rights. By harmonising standards and promoting shared instructional practices, a Pan-African CLE model could strengthen the capacity of African legal education to respond to the continent's socio-legal complexities.

Furthermore, this approach is consistent with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which emphasises education as a driver of transformation and justice. Scholars argue that a Pan-African CLE movement can create a generation of lawyers who not only understand their domestic legal systems but also possess the transnational

competence needed to address Africa's interconnected challenges. Collaborative clinical projects; such as regional moot courts, transnational human rights clinics, and student exchanges; can serve as practical embodiments of this vision. The Pan-African approach thus reframes CLE as a continental strategy for advancing social justice, deepening regional integration, and cultivating a shared identity of African lawyering that is ethical, community-oriented, and globally competitive.

Shifting from Theory to Practice: Mainstreaming CLE and Moot Courts

The current Nigerian legal education model, dominated by theoretical lectures and elective moots, fails to prepare graduates for the strategic demands of law. Professor Ojukwu's call for compulsory participation requires mainstreaming CLE and moot courts into the core curriculum, a reform exemplified at University of Abuja. We integrated CLE from the third year, combining simulations with live cases, transforming teachers into mentors who learn alongside students. This has produced graduates who excel in advocacy, often returning to credit their clinic experiences, reinforcing that student success is an ultimate compensation for the CLE teacher.

As we argued somewhere Clinical Legal Education affords students the opportunity to gain an intensive legal education by providing free access to justice for the poor, the vulnerable and the underrepresented people in the society, thus, providing the student a platform for skills-based, hands-on legal training, and exposing the students to practicing in the interest of the public.

Exchange programmes further amplify this shift. Collaborations with U.S. institutions, such as the University of California College of Law, San Francisco, include seminars on financial crimes and pretrial justice, enabling virtual and in-person interactions. In 2022, our students engaged with U.S. peers and judges, gaining global insights while the CLE teacher co-developed teaching modules, adapting American CLE models to Nigerian contexts. Locally, partnerships with Nasarawa State University and other private Universities including Nile and Baze, extend advocacy training across the metropolis of Abuja, thereby creating a robust regional network. These initiatives, inspired by global best practices, demonstrate that without curriculum integration, the benefits of CLE remain fragmented.

Redesigning Curricula: Knowledge, Skills, and Values

To fully realise these benefits, Nigerian legal education must redesign curricula to emphasise knowledge (doctrinal mastery), skills (practical application), and values (ethics, hard work, contentment, loyalty to the nation). The best teachers model this triad through supervision. At University of Abuja, our CLE modules teach ethics through client confidentiality dilemmas, hard work via rigorous moot preparations, and loyalty to justice systems, through carefully designed social justice projects, despite societal pressures. U.S. exchange programmes introduce comparative values, such as contentment in pro bono work, enriching our approach. Global studies confirm that such redesigns prepare students for 21st-century challenges, yet the conservative frameworks in Nigeria hinder progress. Until the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Council of Legal Education mandate CLE integration, the holistic benefits, for teachers' growth and students' readiness, will remain elusive.

Transformative Benefits: CLE Teachers, Students, and Faculties

Professor Ojukwu's model of compulsory participation in advocacy programmes is a transformative framework for legal education. For teachers, engagement in CLE and moot courts fosters leadership, practical training, and research innovation, position law teachers as valued consultants across legal fields. At the University of Abuja, the supervision of clinics in addressing human rights and access to justice has enhanced consultancy role of the CLE teachers, advising NGOs and government bodies on policy matters. This reflects global findings that CLE equips educators with practical skills absent in traditional teaching, elevating their professional relevance. Moreover, supervising student competitions has facilitated travel by CLE teachers across Africa, and Europe, as well as physical and virtual exchanges with the American's students and faculty, expanding the research networks and global perspective of the law teacher. These experiences affirm Professor Ojukwu's view on compensation: CLE teachers need not focus solely on salaries, as their value is amplified through the successes of their students, which alumni proudly attribute to their mentors, thereby tagging them along with their success. The fulfillment that comes with mentees recognition, appreciation and complements is invaluable.

The University of Abuja Unique Experience

In addition, students benefit immensely, transitioning from passive learners to skilled advocates. The traditional Nigerian legal education emphasises theoretical lectures and optional moots, but CLE introduces real-client interactions, nurturing empathy, ethical reasoning, and problem-solving. At the University of Abuja, our students handle pro bono cases for indigent litigants, developing advocacy skills that lead to bar exam success and early career achievements—testimonies that “tag along” with CLE teachers, which organically enhances the reputations of the CLE teachers. Meanwhile, Law Faculties also gain tremendously. Integrated advocacy programmes elevate institutional profiles, attracting grants and partnerships. It enable faculties to achieve global recognition and fruitful global collaborations. Our participation in CLE programs and initiatives have secured U.S. Embassy funding, enabling physical and virtual exchanges that position University of Abuja as a regional leader in legal education.

Persistent Challenges and the Way Forward

Law is a strategic field in Nigeria, demanding innovation, yet challenges persist. Many teachers still lack practical knowledge, clinging to conservative methods that resist the experiential shift of the CLE. In most Universities in Nigeria, resistance comes from faculty leadership and sometimes political considerations. Other challenges stemmed from workload concerns and funding shortages, reflecting national issues like surging student numbers and inadequate infrastructure. Conservatism often frames new methods as disruptive. And most Faculty leadership do not consider the clinical program as an integral part of the Faculty structure. However, broader reforms, such as NUC-led curriculum updates, are critical to dismantling conservatism and unlocking the potentials in CLE. Similarly, major clinic programs such as exchange programmes and CSO’s partnerships and collaborations have brought down the world of resistance at the faculties. For instance, U.S. visits trainings in virtual CLE have equipped the law clinics that participated to overcome local constraints, fostering adaptability.

It is heartwarming to know that such as resistance has drastically reduced and there is increased understanding of the need and relevance of the law clinics in our legal education framework in Nigeria. And that's why it is time now to talk about the various models that are capable of maximizing the benefits to the students, the teachers and indeed the faculties.

Conclusion

The University of Abuja experiences in the past 18 years, charts a path where compulsory advocacy participation, mainstreamed compensation, and curriculum redesign yield transformative outcomes. CLE creates ecosystems where teachers thrive through student legacies, bolstered by global exchanges with U.S. institutions and local partnerships. Overcoming conservatism requires collective action from NALT, regulators, and faculties to redesign curricula for knowledge, skills, and values, ensuring that the legal education of Nigeria aligns with global standards.

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