



The challenges of teaching legal education to non-law students in Nigerian polytechnics: A case study of Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi

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Abstract

Generally speaking, the introduction and the teaching of legal education in African countries, Nigeria and the Nigerian polytechnics to non-law students has suffered and is suffering a lot of challenges. The increasing demand for higher and legal education and non-availability of infrastructure and or facilities makes the teaching of Legal education to non-law students in Nigerian polytechnics hectic and so challenging especially in Abubakar Tatari Polytechnic, Bauchi. Teaching of legal education to non-law students is facing a lot of challenges. These challenges include but not limited to corruption, over number of students admitted, problem of curriculum and teaching of irrelevant courses to mention a few. These challenges highlighted above, are undermining the teaching of legal education to non-law students in the polytechnics in Nigeria. The study employed qualitative research method in its investigations in order to analyse the data collected. The study proffer solutions and or recommendations ranging from reducing the volume of the curriculum to the limited number of relevant topics to be taught which are relevant to courses offered by the students curtailed corruption, provide infrastructure for conducting teaching of legal education to achieve the goals of establishing the polytechnic education in Nigeria and Abubakar Tatari Polytechnic, Bauchi in particular.

Keywords: Legal, education, polytechnics

Introduction

Legal profession in Nigeria, is traced to the history of colonization. The history of colonization came with the introduction of British legal system in Nigeria, in 1862, after the colonization of an area known as Nigeria with the cessation of Lagos in 1862. Before that time there was no entity known as Nigeria. There were no indigenous trained Legal practitioners to conduct cases in the law courts in the country on behalf of litigants. This gap was filled by individuals who were not trained in the legal education, but acquired some knowledge of the law in the course of working as court clerks or as clerks to some legal practitioners^[1]. Up till the early part of post Independent years, there were no institutions in Nigeria for imparting legal education and for training of Legal practitioners. Any person who^[2] desires to study and practice law in Nigeria had to undergo a tutelage in the United Kingdom^[3]. The United Kingdom was suspicious of on imparting legal education on Nigerians. This idea was meant to serve the political interest of the colonialist to perpetually dominate and lord it over the local people. The British colonialist authorities were thinking at that time that was the legal education would endanger political agitation for partition in the administration of the colony by the natives and therefore the likelihood for early calls for independence. These fears were clearly expressed as follows:

The British Colonial authorities had a deep seated fear of Lawyers. The Indian Nationalist movement had been led by lawyers, and the British anxious to forestall a similar challenges in Africa, discouraged the training of African lawyers. When institutions of higher Education came to be establish in Africa, after the Second World War, law was conspicuously absent. From the subjects offered. The primary method of entering into the legal profession was

through qualification in England as solicitor or Barrister, but the colonial Authorities refused to provide scholarship for law^[4]. The sentiments shown above, were quite expressed with regard to the situation in Nigeria. At that time, those who studied law did it privately, although the colonial administrators awarded scholarships to some Nigerians to study abroad, none was awarded to study law. It is important to note that, before 1960, no institution of higher learning in Nigeria offered law as a course of study

The absence of any institution of higher learning in Nigeria where law was taught as a course did not augur well for the growth and development legal profession and the evolution of indigenous legal system in Nigeria. At that time there were no courses on African legal systems and institutions in Nigeria. The focal point of the training was English law, English legal systems and institutions.

After, the political independence in 1960, faculties of law were established in Nigerian universities to handled academic training of individuals wishing to study law. In addition, the Nigerian law school was established to provide the requisite professional training to enter into the Legal profession. it was argued that the law degree curriculum was later develop to reflect the study of law within the settings of the Nigerian society^[5]. It has further being argued that the indigenous laws of the Nigerian people were not adequately reflected in that curriculum, that is, if reflected at all^[6].

Legal education, is about learning the law in its entirety^[7]. legal education is about issues, about research skills and about understanding, evaluation and justification^[8].

Legal education is taught in the Nigerian polytechnics (Tertiary Institutions) with so many challenges. Despite the facts that the students of the polytechnics are not studying the Law as the core students of Law programmes in the

tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This paper presents a study on how Law Lecturers are being faced with challenges in the course of teaching law in polytechnics in Nigeria and in particular Abubakar Tatari Ali polytechnic, Bauchi. Legal education in the context of this paper covers the gamut of teaching and learning of law, legal research and communication of results of legal research and scholarly knowledge.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching of Legal education in Nigerian polytechnics as a mandatory course to non law students requires overhauling in order to meet the standard required in student's performances in Nigerian polytechnics including Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi. The polytechnics offer legal studies programs, particularly in areas of Business and Public Law. The effectiveness of legal education in Nigerian polytechnics is crucial for producing well-trained graduates who can contribute meaningfully to commercial and administrative fields. the Polytechnic curriculum is developed with the introduction of basic legal concepts and terminology to improve non-law students' ability to read and understand legal concept as well as to familiarize them with the general aspects of law related to their area of specialization and to enable them work in a team with legal practitioners^[9].

Despite its importance, the teaching of legal education in Nigerian polytechnics faces several challenges that threaten its quality and effectiveness. Students' performance in legal education in Nigerian polytechnics comes with a lot of problems, such problem are problems of curriculum, corruption, overstretched facilities, over number of admitted students against the NBTE approved number of students per streams and programme etc. This study seeks to investigate the specific challenges affecting the teaching of legal education at Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi, and explore possible solutions to enhance the quality and relevance of legal studies in Nigerian polytechnics. These problems are what this paper seeks to address.

Challenges Facing Teaching of Law to Non-Law Students in Nigerian Polytechnics

Teaching legal education in the Nigerian Polytechnics to non law students is being faced by a lot of challenges which includes but not limited to problem of curriculum, corruption, overstretched facilities, over number of students in a class etc.

a. Problem Of Overload Curriculum/ Syllabus

The problem of overload curriculum/syllabus in teaching legal education in the polytechnics in Nigeria and in particular Abubakar Tatari Ali polytechnic is a onerous task and hectic. This is because the curriculum for teaching legal education is overburdened with so many law topics in a semester and or level as is centrally designed by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and applied to all Nigerian Polytechnics. For example, National Diploma in Local Government studies II offered Local Government Law I, which contained

1. The Law of contract which comprise

- a. Define a contract
- b. Know the essential elements of a valid contract
- c. Explain the factors that can vitiate a contract

- d. Explain discharge of contract
- e. Explain breach of contract
- f. Explain the remedies for breach of contract
- g. Explain the contractual liability of Local government in contracts

2. The Law of Tort

- a. Define 'Tort'
- b. Explain tortious liability and breach of duty of care
- c. Give an outline of the capacity of special classes of persons (minors, judicial officers, law enforcement agents, women etc.) to sue and be sued in Tort.
- d. Identify specific torts against persons: defamation, negligence and trespass.
- e. Identify specific torts against property such as trespass, conversion, etc.
- f. Explain the tort of negligence
- g. Explain the general defence on liability in torts
- h. Explain the liability of Local Government in Tort: vicarious liability, trespass, etc.

3. Criminal Law

- a. Define crime
- b. Differentiate between a crime and civil wrong
- c. Know the constituent elements of a crime, actus reus, mens rea and causation
- d. Identify specific offences against persons and against property
- e. Know the effects of crime committed by the Local Government officers and employees^[10].

From the above curriculum, it is evidently clear in the class per semester you have to teach the students the law of contract, the criminal law and the law of Torts. Even the law students who are studying law to become lawyers are taking the above courses per semester and at various level and not in one semester. Then what of non-law students?.

b. Admitting Over Numbered Students and Overstretched Facilities

Admitting over numbered students in some courses. Students usually admitted are over numbered far beyond the facilities provided for learning. The polytechnics are admitting so many students. E.g in a class of ND 1, Public Administration are admitting over 700 hundred students. Furthermore, these students are receiving their lectures in a class or lecture theatre that accommodate only 200-250 students. Furthermore, a number polytechnics exists without acceptable standard facilities, such as classrooms, tutorial rooms, offices for lecturers and well stocked libraries^[11].

c. Corruption

Corruption is defined as a pervasive issue in Nigeria in General and the education sector is not immune^[12]. Legal education in Nigerian polytechnics is particularly susceptible. This is because, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) sets admission policies for Polytechnics in Nigeria and to ensure strict compliance, so that students possess the necessary academic foundation for their chosen program. Failure to observe these policies in teaching legal education programmes at Nigerian polytechnics is a form of corruption. For if NBTE granted interim accreditation of 3 streams of 30 students each totalling 90 students instead the Polytechnic admits 700

students per programme thereby breaching the rules of the NBTE which is also a corruption. What then is corruption?

Corruption is a phenomenon in our education, social life etc. Corruption is defined in the legal parlance by Black's Law dictionary Ninth edition, at p. 397 to mean depravity, perversion or taint; an impairment of integrity, virtue or moral principles; esp. , the impairment of public official's duties by bribery.

Corruption it is also define as the act of doing something with an intent to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others; a fiduciary's or official's use of a station or office to procure some benefit either personally or for someone else, contrary to the rights of others. Corruption also defined as the breach or perversion of legal rules, established procedures, and code of conduct or social norms in the service of unethical or illegitimate ends^[13].

Weak Mechanisms for Implementation

The implementation of policies and curricula in teaching legal education in Nigerian polytechnics faces several weaknesses that undermine the quality and effectiveness of legal education. These weak mechanisms include:

1. Poor Policy Enforcement and Regulatory Oversight

Although there are policies governing legal education in polytechnics, enforcement remains weak due to inadequate supervision by regulatory bodies such as the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). Many institutions fail to fully comply with curriculum standards, leading to inconsistencies in program delivery.

2. Outdated and Rigid Curriculum

Many polytechnics still use outdated curricula that do not align with modern legal practices and evolving legal education standards. Inflexible curriculum structures make it difficult to integrate new legal trends, such as technology law, environmental law, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR).

3. Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Many polytechnics lack structured monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of legal education policies. Without continuous review processes, institutions fail to identify gaps in curriculum implementation, teaching methodologies, and student performance.

4. Institutional Bureaucracy and Policy Inconsistencies

The bureaucratic processes involved in approving and implementing educational policies in polytechnics often cause delays in curriculum reviews, faculty recruitment, and facility upgrades. Additionally, inconsistencies in government policies on polytechnic education further weaken policy implementation.

5. Inadequate manpower

Inadequate manpower in the teaching of law courses in Abubakar Tatari Ali polytechnic, causes overload on the part of the lecturers teaching law. The shortage of manpower in the polytechnic considering the number of students admitted and the courses offered (law) is hectic and cannot get the desired objective. In the whole of school of management studies all the programs offered law and some

courses in the school of General studies and the school of Environmental and Azare campus of the polytechnic. The total number of the lecturers teaching law in the polytechnic are 3. Therefore, these lecturers are inadequate to serve the polytechnic effectively^[14].

Methodology

This study adopt a qualitative research approach to examine the challenges of teaching legal education in Nigerian polytechnics, with a specific focus on Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi. The methodology will involve the following components:

1. Research Design

The study will utilize a **descriptive survey design**, which is appropriate for understanding the current challenges, experiences, and perceptions of legal education in polytechnics. This approach will help gather firsthand information from relevant stakeholders.

2. Scope and Limitations/ Area of the study

The study focused solely on Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi, and may not be fully generalizable to other Nigerian polytechnics. However, its findings can provide valuable insights applicable to similar institutions facing related challenges.

Recommendations

To improve the quality and effectiveness of legal education at Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi, and other Nigerian polytechnics, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Strengthening Policy Implementation and Regulatory Oversight

- The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should ensure strict enforcement of legal education policies and curriculum standards in polytechnics.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be introduced to assess the effectiveness of legal education programs.

2. Modernization and Flexibility of the Curriculum

- The legal education curriculum should be updated regularly to align with contemporary legal practices and emerging fields such as cyber law, environmental law, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
- Polytechnic legal education should incorporate practical training components, including moot courts, mock trials, and case study analysis.
- A more flexible curriculum structure should be introduced to allow for interdisciplinary learning, integrating law with business, technology, and governance.

Conclusion

The weak implementation of policies and curricula in teaching legal education in Nigerian polytechnics is a major barrier to producing competent graduates in the legal field. Addressing these challenges requires stronger regulatory enforcement, increased funding, curriculum modernization, better lecturer training, and stronger industry partnerships. Implementing these recommendations at Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi, and other Nigerian polytechnics

will significantly improve the quality, credibility, and effectiveness of legal education. By addressing funding gaps, curriculum modernization, lecturer recruitment, policy enforcement, and industry linkages, polytechnic legal education can be made more relevant and impactful.

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