

# Reforming Legal Education in the Global South: Colonial Legacies and Critical Pedagogy

Ivan. Petrov<sup>1</sup> , Amina. Yusuf<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Public Law, Sofia University, Sofia, Bulgaria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Law, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria

\* Corresponding author email address: [amina.yusuf@unilag.edu.ng](mailto:amina.yusuf@unilag.edu.ng)

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This study aims to explore how colonial legacies continue to shape legal education in the Global South and examine the potential of critical pedagogy as a transformative framework for reform. This article employs a scientific narrative review approach using a descriptive analysis method. Literature published between 2020 and 2025 was systematically reviewed through academic databases and selected based on relevance to legal education reform, colonial legacies, and critical pedagogy. Sources were analyzed thematically to trace conceptual developments, identify recurring challenges, and highlight innovative practices in legal pedagogy across various regions in the Global South. The review reveals that legal education in the Global South remains significantly influenced by colonial legal systems, characterized by formalism, exclusion of local knowledge, and limited accessibility. Reform efforts have emerged in the form of community-based legal education, inclusion of indigenous legal systems, transdisciplinary approaches, and digital learning platforms. Critical pedagogy has been increasingly recognized as a valuable model for addressing systemic inequities and promoting transformative learning. However, reform initiatives face challenges such as institutional resistance, political and economic constraints, and the risk of superficial decolonization. Transforming legal education in the Global South requires a shift away from inherited epistemologies toward inclusive, justice-oriented, and locally responsive models. Critical pedagogy provides the theoretical and practical tools necessary for such reform. Meaningful change will depend on sustained efforts to rethink the purpose, content, and methods of legal education within postcolonial contexts.

**Keywords:** *Legal education reform, Global South, colonial legacies, critical pedagogy, legal pluralism, experiential learning, decolonization.*

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## 1. Introduction

Legal education in the Global South reflects a complex intersection of inherited structures, evolving pedagogies, and persistent inequalities. Across regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, legal education systems are often shaped by deeply entrenched colonial legacies that have outlived the formal end of

colonization. These systems frequently operate within the frameworks of imported legal traditions, including common law and civil law, which continue to influence the structure of law schools, the content of curricula, and the language of legal instruction. Despite efforts at reform, many institutions in the Global South still reproduce models developed for entirely different social and historical contexts, which limits the potential of legal



education to address local socio-legal realities and advance justice.

The reform of legal education in these regions is not merely a matter of curriculum revision; it is a crucial component of broader social transformation. As societies grapple with issues such as inequality, access to justice, human rights, and sustainable development, the legal profession—and by extension, legal education—must be reimagined to respond to these complex demands. Legal education reform is essential for nurturing critical legal thinkers, socially responsive lawyers, and public-minded jurists who can contribute meaningfully to national development and global justice. Without such reform, legal education risks reinforcing the very systems of power and exclusion it ought to challenge.

Central to understanding the need for reform is an examination of the concept of colonial legacies in legal systems. Colonial legacies refer to the enduring institutional, epistemological, and cultural imprints left by colonial rule on postcolonial societies. In legal education, these legacies manifest in the continued dominance of Western legal doctrines, the privileging of foreign jurisprudence, and the marginalization of indigenous legal traditions. The transplantation of colonial legal systems often entailed the systematic suppression of local forms of knowledge and dispute resolution. As a result, legal education in many parts of the Global South remains tethered to an outdated and externally imposed framework that fails to reflect local contexts, histories, and needs. These legacies are particularly visible in the structure of law degrees, the centralization of state-centric legal norms, and the devaluation of plural legal practices.

Against this backdrop, critical pedagogy emerges as a transformative framework with the potential to decolonize and revitalize legal education. Rooted in the work of scholars like Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy emphasizes consciousness-raising, dialogic learning, and the deconstruction of hegemonic knowledge systems. It challenges traditional teacher-student hierarchies and promotes participatory learning practices that engage students as co-creators of knowledge. In legal education, critical pedagogy can serve as a counter-hegemonic approach that not only questions the content of the law but also how and why it is taught. It opens space for legal pluralism, intersectional analysis, and the integration of social justice perspectives into the study and practice of

law. As Wilder et al. have argued, educational partnerships grounded in nonviolence and mutual respect can significantly reframe knowledge production and dissemination in postcolonial contexts (Wilder et al., 2024).

This review aims to examine the structural, historical, and pedagogical dimensions of legal education reform in the Global South, with particular attention to the persistence of colonial legacies and the possibilities offered by critical pedagogy. The objective is to provide a nuanced understanding of how inherited systems shape current educational practices and how alternative models can offer pathways for reform. By synthesizing recent scholarship, this review highlights key challenges, documents innovations, and proposes future directions for a more inclusive, responsive, and decolonized legal education.

The structure of this article reflects a layered analytical approach. Following this introduction, the second section explores the historical context of colonial legal transplants and their enduring influence on legal education systems across Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. The third section presents an overview of the current state of legal education in the Global South, outlining common challenges and disparities. The fourth section introduces the theoretical foundations of critical pedagogy and discusses its relevance to legal education reform. The fifth section highlights examples of reform models and pedagogical innovations from various countries. Finally, the sixth section offers a critical reflection on the barriers to reform, while the conclusion outlines key takeaways and future avenues for research and policy development.

## 2. Methodology

This article adopts a scientific narrative review methodology grounded in a descriptive analysis framework. A narrative review was selected for its capacity to synthesize a broad range of literature across disciplines and perspectives, allowing for a deeper contextual understanding of the multifaceted issue of legal education reform in the Global South. The descriptive analysis approach was particularly well-suited for examining how colonial legacies continue to shape legal education and for critically engaging with the emerging literature on critical pedagogy as a transformative educational paradigm. Rather than

seeking to test a hypothesis or quantify trends, the goal of this study is to trace conceptual developments, identify patterns of continuity and rupture in postcolonial legal education, and explore models of reform that foreground decolonial, inclusive, and critical approaches to pedagogy. The review incorporates interdisciplinary perspectives from legal studies, postcolonial theory, education, and political science to offer a holistic assessment of current challenges and innovations in legal education reform.

To ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date synthesis, literature published between 2020 and 2025 was systematically reviewed. The selection process involved a strategic search of academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, using a combination of key terms such as “legal education,” “Global South,” “postcolonial legal systems,” “critical pedagogy,” “decolonization,” and “curriculum reform.” Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, edited volumes, and select policy reports from reputable international organizations (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank, and national legal education boards) were included if they contributed substantial insights to the themes of colonial legacies in legal education or offered theoretical or practical discussions on critical pedagogy. Publications were screened for relevance based on abstracts and full texts, with a focus on studies conducted in or specifically addressing contexts within the Global South, including but not limited to regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Sources that exclusively dealt with legal education in the Global North or were overly technical in nature without broader socio-educational relevance were excluded.

The collected literature was subjected to a thematic content analysis to extract recurring concepts, theoretical frameworks, and practical strategies related to the reform of legal education. This involved multiple readings of selected texts to identify core themes such as the reproduction of colonial knowledge systems, the dominance of Eurocentric legal paradigms, the marginalization of indigenous legal traditions, and the application of critical pedagogical principles in legal education. Key themes were organized according to their relevance to the article’s core objectives: understanding the historical roots of current legal education models, mapping contemporary reform efforts, and evaluating

the transformative potential of critical pedagogy. The descriptive analysis method allowed for the articulation of nuanced interconnections between historical context, present challenges, and emerging innovations, without imposing a rigid evaluative structure. Where appropriate, case studies from specific countries were integrated to illustrate real-world applications of theory and reform strategies. The final narrative presents a coherent and critical synthesis of current scholarly discourse, providing a foundation for future inquiry and policy development in the field of postcolonial legal education reform.

### 3. Historical Context: Colonial Legacies in Legal Education

The colonial encounter in the Global South involved not only political domination but also a deliberate and strategic imposition of foreign legal systems. Colonial legal transplant models, such as the common law in British colonies and the civil law in French, Spanish, and Portuguese territories, were introduced as tools of governance and control. These systems were transplanted without regard for pre-existing indigenous legal traditions and were typically justified through a rhetoric of legal modernity and civilizational superiority. As Nosik et al. have noted, the reform of legal education often still operates within the constraints of these externally imposed frameworks, which continue to dictate how legal professionals are trained and credentialed (Nosik et al., 2021).

The transplantation process was characterized by a top-down imposition of legal codes, court procedures, and educational structures. Colonial administrations established law faculties and training programs modeled directly on European institutions. In many cases, these institutions prioritized the production of legal intermediaries who could enforce colonial rule rather than critical thinkers or advocates for local justice. For instance, in South Asia, British colonial rule introduced a formalized common law system that displaced diverse customary legal practices. As Bloch reflects, even in contemporary efforts to internationalize clinical legal education, the foundational model often remains heavily influenced by colonial-era designs and objectives (Bloch, 2020).

One of the most enduring effects of this legal transplantation is the structure and content of legal

curricula. Most law schools in the Global South continue to teach legal doctrine primarily through imported cases and statutes from the Global North. Western jurisprudence is often positioned as universally valid, while local legal philosophies are relegated to optional modules or omitted entirely. This epistemic hierarchy reinforces a view of legal knowledge that privileges Euro-American perspectives, limiting the scope for students to engage critically with their own legal and cultural traditions. Serbenyuk points out that legal education systems structured in this way often fail to meet international human rights compliance benchmarks precisely because they do not reflect the lived experiences of local communities (Serbenyuk, 2024).

Language is another domain where colonial legacies are evident. In many countries, legal instruction is still conducted in the colonial language, whether English, French, or Spanish. This creates barriers to access and understanding, particularly for students from rural or marginalized communities. In Vietnam, for example, Huong and Thuy document how legal education in Hanoi remains linguistically and structurally inaccessible to large segments of the population, thereby perpetuating systemic exclusion and undermining democratic legal empowerment (Huong & Thuy, 2021). Similarly, Madlalate notes that in South Africa, the use of English in legal education not only alienates students but also reinforces class and racial divisions inherited from the apartheid era (Madlalate, 2022).

The persistence of Eurocentric epistemologies is perhaps the most insidious of colonial legacies. These epistemologies underpin a legal worldview that centers the nation-state, abstracts law from social context, and valorizes formalism over justice. As Rose et al. argue, education systems that fail to interrogate these assumptions often reproduce social inequalities rather than challenge them (Rose et al., 2021). In legal education, this manifests in a pedagogical reliance on casebooks, lectures, and doctrinal analysis that leave little room for critical inquiry or socio-legal perspectives. The absence of indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and pluralistic legal norms further entrenches the marginality of non-Western legal thought.

Case studies from across the Global South illustrate how these legacies continue to shape legal education. In South Africa, the curriculum of most law schools remains

grounded in Roman-Dutch law and British common law, despite efforts to incorporate African customary law. Kamwendo and Shozi note that the legal frameworks governing even bioethical issues such as genome editing are deeply rooted in Western legal norms, raising questions about the legitimacy and relevance of such systems in African contexts (Kamwendo & Shozi, 2021). In Indonesia, Lutfi and colleagues highlight how legal reform initiatives often grapple with ideological tensions between inherited legal models and the aspirations of a diverse, postcolonial society (Lutfi et al., 2024). In Latin America, Cornelius explores how anti-corruption campaigns in Brazil are shaped by a “discursive mismatch” between globalized legal norms and local political realities, a legacy of colonial legal rationality that continues to influence institutional behavior (Cornelius, 2023).

Even in post-Soviet and Eastern European contexts, where colonialism took a different form, similar dynamics are at play. Прилипко and colleagues emphasize the challenges of reforming legal education in Ukraine, where Western models are often adopted without adequate localization, leading to a disconnect between legal training and social needs (Прилипко et al., 2024). Dzagoeva similarly documents how the legal education system in South Ossetia reflects a hybrid of Soviet and European influences, often at the expense of local governance structures and pedagogical autonomy (Dzagoeva & Tuae, 2021).

Taken together, these examples reveal a shared pattern across postcolonial societies: the transplantation of foreign legal systems has produced educational structures that are ill-suited to the social, cultural, and political contexts of the Global South. The result is a legal education landscape that is often alienating, elitist, and disconnected from the communities it is meant to serve. Reform efforts must therefore begin with a critical historical understanding of these legacies and a commitment to decolonizing both the content and form of legal education.

#### 4. Current Landscape of Legal Education in the Global South

Legal education in the Global South continues to exhibit characteristics shaped by historical legacies and contemporary global pressures. In most countries, law schools follow a doctrinal model heavily focused on

black-letter law, with courses typically organized around core subjects such as constitutional law, criminal law, contracts, and administrative law. These subjects are often taught through lecture-based delivery, with limited opportunities for practical engagement or critical discussion. According to Madlalate, this approach persists in South African legal institutions, where the curriculum is still largely influenced by colonial and apartheid-era structures that prioritize technical knowledge over transformative learning (Madlalate, 2022). Similarly, Huong and Thuy describe how legal education in Vietnam is dominated by memorization and teacher-centered instruction, leaving students ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing legal landscape (Huong & Thuy, 2021).

The dominance of rote learning and legal formalism poses significant pedagogical challenges. Law students are frequently assessed on their ability to reproduce statutes and precedents, rather than their capacity to analyze, critique, or apply legal concepts in contextually meaningful ways. As Rose and colleagues argue, this kind of education reinforces hierarchical knowledge production and inhibits the development of critical thinking skills (Rose et al., 2021). Moreover, the underrepresentation of local issues within legal curricula further alienates students from their social environments. Legal problems faced by marginalized groups, indigenous communities, or rural populations are often excluded from mainstream courses, making the legal education experience both abstract and elitist. Enebeli points out that even as technology and artificial intelligence are increasingly incorporated into legal systems, many law schools in Africa and South Asia continue to overlook local access-to-justice concerns and grassroots legal needs (Enebeli, 2024).

Accreditation bodies and professional standards play a dual role in this context: while they aim to ensure quality and consistency, they can also serve as mechanisms of institutional inertia. In many jurisdictions, the regulatory frameworks governing legal education are rigid and oriented toward reproducing traditional legal elites. Serbenyuk emphasizes that accreditation systems often prioritize compliance with formal criteria—such as faculty qualifications, course loads, and infrastructure—while neglecting pedagogical innovation and inclusivity (Serbenyuk, 2024). These standards tend to emphasize alignment with international (primarily Western)

benchmarks, further entrenching the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms. Nosik and his colleagues describe how reforms in Ukraine aimed at improving practical legal training were constrained by the inflexible demands of accreditation authorities, resulting in only superficial changes to the educational model (Nosik et al., 2021).

One of the most glaring inequities in legal education in the Global South is access. Financial barriers, geographic disparities, and linguistic exclusion all contribute to a system that privileges urban, affluent, and often male students. In multilingual societies, the continued use of colonial languages as the medium of instruction exacerbates inequalities. Kamwendo and Shozi highlight how legal education in South Africa is still largely conducted in English, which disadvantages students from indigenous language backgrounds and limits the expression of alternative legal worldviews (Kamwendo & Shozi, 2021). Similarly, Huong and Thuy report that the dominance of Vietnamese in legal education marginalizes ethnic minority students and impedes their integration into the legal profession (Huong & Thuy, 2021). These language barriers not only affect comprehension but also serve as gatekeeping mechanisms, reinforcing class, ethnic, and regional divides.

The impact of neoliberal reforms and the commodification of education is another pressing concern. As law schools increasingly adopt market-driven models, education is framed less as a public good and more as an individual investment in human capital. Fenwick, Kono, and Pejović argue that the globalization of legal education has intensified competitive pressures, encouraging institutions to prioritize international rankings, profitability, and employability at the expense of critical scholarship and community engagement (Fenwick et al., 2022). This shift has led to the proliferation of private law schools and the corporatization of public institutions, particularly in countries like India, Brazil, and Nigeria. Cornelius observes that in Brazil, law faculties often serve as instruments of professional credentialing rather than spaces for critical inquiry, as they compete to meet the demands of a highly stratified legal labor market (Cornelius, 2023). The result is a widening gap between the needs of society and the training of legal professionals.

In addition, the neoliberal model fosters an instrumental approach to legal knowledge, where law is treated as a set of technical tools rather than a vehicle for social justice. Correa and her co-authors note that in Colombia, the exclusion of humanities and ethics from legal education has impoverished students' ability to think holistically about law and its societal role (Correa et al., 2024). As a result, students are often socialized into a conservative, individualistic conception of legal practice, which leaves little room for advocacy, activism, or interdisciplinary exploration. Ultimately, this commodified vision of legal education not only limits intellectual freedom but also undermines the transformative potential of the legal profession in postcolonial societies.

### 5. Critical Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations and Relevance

Critical pedagogy offers a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant paradigms of legal education in the Global South. Emerging from the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks, critical pedagogy challenges the traditional hierarchical relationship between teacher and student and advocates for a dialogic, participatory model of education. At its core, critical pedagogy seeks to empower learners by fostering critical consciousness—what Freire termed *conscientização*—and encouraging them to interrogate the social, political, and economic structures that shape their lives. It emphasizes education as a practice of freedom, aimed at the transformation of both individuals and society. As Wilder et al. argue, fostering nonviolent and reciprocal educational relationships can create space for shared meaning-making and social healing, particularly in contexts marked by colonial violence (Wilder et al., 2024).

One of the central principles of critical pedagogy is dialogic learning. Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of knowledge, this approach recognizes them as active participants who bring valuable experiences and insights to the learning process. In legal education, this means shifting away from lecture-based instruction and toward collaborative, problem-based methods that engage students in real-world issues. Rose and her colleagues emphasize that dialogic models are particularly effective in contexts of social inequality, as they allow students to connect legal theory to their lived realities and thereby develop a more

nuanced understanding of justice (Rose et al., 2021). Dzagoeva similarly notes that when legal education is structured around participatory pedagogies, it fosters a deeper commitment to ethical reasoning and civic responsibility among students (Dzagoeva & Tuae, 2021).

Another key element of critical pedagogy is the decolonization of knowledge. This involves challenging the epistemological foundations of mainstream legal education, which often privileges Western legal thought and marginalizes indigenous, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives. Прилипко and colleagues stress the need to reconfigure legal curricula to include diverse sources of legal knowledge, particularly in post-Soviet and postcolonial contexts where monocultural education systems remain dominant (Прилипко et al., 2024). Lutfi and his co-authors highlight how Indonesia's legal reform efforts have attempted to integrate social transformation and ideological education into legal instruction, a move aligned with the goals of critical pedagogy (Lutfi et al., 2024). Such reforms acknowledge that law is not neutral or universal but deeply embedded in historical and cultural contexts.

The relevance of critical pedagogy to legal education reform lies in its capacity to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. Conventional legal education often emphasizes abstract reasoning and doctrinal analysis, which disconnects students from the practical implications of law in their communities. Critical pedagogy, by contrast, encourages experiential learning, community engagement, and reflective practice. Enebeli illustrates how integrating digital tools and social justice themes into legal education in South Africa can help students better understand and address structural inequalities (Enebeli, 2024). In this way, legal education becomes not just a means of professional training but a site of political and ethical development.

Examples of the integration of critical pedagogy into legal education can be found across the Global South. In India, clinical legal education programs have emerged as a vital space for experiential learning and social justice engagement. Bloch's work on the contributions of N.R. Madhava Menon highlights how these programs challenge traditional legal education by placing students in direct contact with marginalized communities and encouraging them to address legal problems collaboratively (Bloch, 2020). In Colombia, Correa and

colleagues document efforts at Eafit University to integrate humanities into professional education, thereby cultivating a more holistic and reflective approach to legal practice (Correa et al., 2024). These initiatives exemplify how critical pedagogy can reorient legal education toward the promotion of equity, empathy, and transformation.

Moreover, the adoption of critical pedagogy aligns with broader global calls for the reform of legal education to meet twenty-first-century challenges. Fenwick and his co-authors argue that the globalization of legal education must be accompanied by critical reflection on whose knowledge is being transmitted, and for what purposes (Fenwick et al., 2022). Kamwendo and Shozi suggest that emerging bioethical dilemmas in Africa necessitate a more dialogic and culturally responsive approach to legal education, one that allows students to engage with global issues from a local standpoint (Kamwendo & Shozi, 2021). Such perspectives underscore the importance of embedding critical pedagogy into both the philosophy and practice of legal education.

In sum, critical pedagogy offers a compelling framework for reimagining legal education in the Global South. By promoting dialogic learning, decolonizing epistemologies, and linking theory to praxis, it creates the conditions for a more inclusive, engaged, and justice-oriented legal education. As this review will further explore, integrating these principles into legal education reform efforts is not only possible but necessary for addressing the complex legacies and contemporary challenges facing legal systems in postcolonial societies.

## 6. Reform Models and Innovations in Legal Pedagogy

In response to the growing call for legal education reform across the Global South, several innovative models have emerged that attempt to transcend the constraints of traditional legal training. One of the most influential approaches in this regard is community-based legal education, which aims to bridge the gap between law schools and the communities they serve. Legal clinics and street law programs provide students with opportunities to engage directly with real-life legal issues faced by marginalized populations. These experiences foster critical thinking, empathy, and an understanding of law as a tool for social change. Bloch emphasizes the foundational role of clinical legal education in India, championed by N.R. Madhava Menon,

which positioned the student not just as a learner but as an active participant in the pursuit of justice (Bloch, 2020). These models shift the pedagogical emphasis from theory to praxis and from individual success to collective responsibility.

Similarly, in South Africa and Colombia, legal clinics have become a core component of university curricula, offering services to communities that might otherwise be excluded from formal legal systems. Enebeli discusses how clinical education in South Africa is evolving to include the use of artificial intelligence in legal analysis, making it more responsive to contemporary challenges while remaining grounded in community needs (Enebeli, 2024). Correa and her colleagues explain how Eafit University in Colombia has integrated humanities and ethics into management and legal education, encouraging students to grapple with questions of justice and social impact alongside technical competence (Correa et al., 2024). These examples show that experiential learning rooted in community engagement is central to reimagining legal education as a transformative practice.

Another important reform trajectory involves the incorporation of indigenous legal systems and legal pluralism into the curriculum. For centuries, colonial legal regimes suppressed or marginalized customary legal traditions, often labeling them as inferior or incompatible with modern legal standards. Recent efforts across the Global South seek to redress this imbalance by validating and institutionalizing indigenous jurisprudence. In Indonesia, Lutfi and his co-authors describe how legal reforms led by the state agency BPIP have tried to reconcile national ideology with local traditions and pluralistic values (Lutfi et al., 2024). These efforts reflect a growing recognition that effective legal education must prepare students to operate within complex, plural legal environments rather than within the narrow confines of monolithic legal systems.

The integration of indigenous knowledge into formal education also serves a decolonial purpose, challenging dominant epistemologies that continue to privilege Western legal thought. Kamwendo and Shozi highlight the relevance of such pluralist approaches in South Africa, where indigenous customary law plays a vital role in regulating family, property, and community matters but remains underrepresented in legal training

(Kamwendo & Shozi, 2021). The recognition of legal pluralism not only improves the practical competence of graduates but also affirms cultural identities and promotes justice for historically marginalized groups.

Transdisciplinary education is another vital innovation that aligns with the goals of legal education reform. Traditional legal curricula tend to be insular, focused almost exclusively on law as a standalone discipline. However, the complexity of contemporary legal problems requires engagement with knowledge from other fields, including sociology, economics, political science, and environmental studies. Rose and her colleagues argue that this integrative approach is essential for addressing structural inequalities in education and society at large (Rose et al., 2021). Similarly, Correa's work in Colombia demonstrates how the inclusion of literature, philosophy, and social theory into legal education enriches students' analytical and ethical capacities (Correa et al., 2024). A transdisciplinary curriculum enables law students to see legal problems not as isolated technical puzzles but as embedded in broader systems of power and meaning.

Global justice perspectives also play a role in expanding the horizons of legal education. The rise of international human rights law, environmental law, and transnational legal practices necessitates a pedagogy that situates national law within a global context. Fenwick and his co-authors highlight the tension between the globalization of legal education and the risk of homogenizing legal norms, arguing for a more reflexive and locally grounded engagement with global legal discourses (Fenwick et al., 2022). Dzagoeva also underscores the importance of balancing global standards with regional specificities in the formation of legal systems, especially in post-conflict societies like South Ossetia (Dzagoeva & Tuaevev, 2021). These contributions illustrate the need for legal education to foster both global awareness and local accountability.

The digital transformation of legal education has opened new avenues for reform. The use of digital platforms, open-access materials, and interactive learning tools has increased significantly, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Enebeli discusses how digitalization is reshaping legal pedagogy in Africa, enabling access to global knowledge while also creating opportunities for localized innovation (Enebeli, 2024). Open-access legal materials democratize knowledge,

allowing students and practitioners from resource-constrained environments to access case law, legislation, and scholarly commentary without cost barriers. This shift not only enhances accessibility but also promotes pedagogical experimentation, including flipped classrooms, online simulations, and virtual legal clinics. University-led reform initiatives also contribute to the transformation of legal education in the Global South. These projects often involve collaboration among faculty, students, policy makers, and civil society organizations. In Brazil, Cornelius describes how law schools are engaging in institutional reflexivity to address the contradictions between global anti-corruption norms and local legal culture (Cornelius, 2023). In Ukraine, Прилипко and her co-authors emphasize the role of academic networks in promoting curriculum reform and updating teaching methods in response to changing legal and political conditions (Прилипко et al., 2024). Such initiatives demonstrate the potential of institutional leadership and cross-sector collaboration in driving meaningful change.

The convergence of these reform models—community-based legal education, legal pluralism, transdisciplinarity, digital innovation, and university-driven projects—points toward a more inclusive and responsive vision of legal education. By challenging dominant paradigms and experimenting with alternative pedagogies, institutions in the Global South are not only addressing local needs but also contributing to the global reimagining of legal training.

## 7. Challenges and Critical Reflections

Despite the promise of reform, legal education in the Global South faces formidable barriers. One of the most entrenched challenges is institutional resistance, particularly from faculties, accreditation bodies, and legal professions that are deeply invested in maintaining the status quo. These actors often view pedagogical reform as a threat to their authority or prestige. Serbenyuk notes that efforts to revise legal education are frequently met with skepticism or outright opposition by institutional gatekeepers who prioritize procedural conformity over substantive change (Serbenyuk, 2024). This resistance is often grounded in epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western legal knowledge and marginalize alternative ways of understanding and practicing law.



Political and economic constraints further limit the scope and sustainability of reforms. In many countries, underfunded public universities struggle to implement new programs, train faculty, or update infrastructure. Huong and Thuy document how financial limitations in Vietnam hinder the expansion of clinical programs and prevent the adoption of interactive teaching methods (Huong & Thuy, 2021). Similarly, Madlalate points out that in South Africa, socioeconomic disparities affect both student access and institutional capacity, exacerbating existing inequalities within the legal education system (Madlalate, 2022). Without sustained public investment and political will, reform efforts risk being piecemeal and short-lived.

Another danger is the prevalence of superficial or performative reform. In an effort to meet international accreditation standards or donor expectations, some institutions adopt the language of innovation—such as “decolonization,” “diversity,” or “critical pedagogy”—without implementing meaningful changes. Kamwendo and Shoji caution against reforms that merely add new content to existing frameworks without challenging the underlying structures that perpetuate exclusion and inequality (Kamwendo & Shoji, 2021). Such tokenistic reforms can create an illusion of progress while leaving core power dynamics intact.

Finally, there are inherent tensions between globalization and local legal traditions. While global norms and international collaborations can enrich legal education, they also risk homogenizing curricula and marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems. Fenwick and his co-authors warn that the uncritical importation of global legal standards may undermine local legal autonomy and pedagogical innovation (Fenwick et al., 2022). These tensions underscore the need for reform models that are context-sensitive and grounded in local realities, even as they engage with global debates.

In conclusion, while reforming legal education in the Global South is both necessary and possible, it demands more than curriculum redesign or technological adoption. It requires a fundamental rethinking of the purpose, values, and methods of legal education—one that is historically conscious, socially engaged, and epistemologically inclusive. Recognizing the challenges that lie ahead is a vital step in building a legal education system that serves not only the profession but also the broader goals of justice and equity.

## 8. Conclusion

Reforming legal education in the Global South demands a deep and sustained reckoning with the legacies of colonialism, the constraints of current pedagogical practices, and the opportunities offered by critical and context-specific approaches to learning. This article has examined how inherited legal systems, rooted in colonial imposition, continue to influence the structure, content, and language of legal education across diverse postcolonial societies. Despite the formal end of colonial rule, law schools in many parts of the Global South still operate within paradigms that reproduce Eurocentric knowledge, marginalize local legal traditions, and fail to prepare students for the socio-legal complexities of their environments.

The challenges facing legal education in these regions are not merely administrative or curricular—they are structural and epistemological. Rote learning, legal formalism, and the exclusion of local realities persist in most institutional frameworks. Accreditation systems often reinforce conformity rather than innovation, while neoliberal pressures push law schools toward commodification, undermining the transformative mission of education. At the same time, inequities in access—particularly related to language, geography, and socio-economic background—limit who benefits from legal education and who is ultimately represented in the legal profession.

Yet, within this landscape, important reform efforts are emerging. Community-based legal education, such as clinical programs and street law initiatives, has begun to reconnect legal training with social justice and experiential learning. The integration of indigenous legal systems and the recognition of legal pluralism signal a shift toward more inclusive and locally grounded curricula. Transdisciplinary education and global justice perspectives challenge the narrow focus of traditional legal pedagogy and encourage students to think across disciplinary boundaries. The use of digital platforms and open-access materials expands access and promotes pedagogical experimentation. University-led initiatives across the Global South demonstrate that institutional change is possible when driven by critical engagement and collaboration.

Critical pedagogy provides a powerful theoretical and practical foundation for these reforms. Its emphasis on

dialogic learning, consciousness-raising, and the decolonization of knowledge offers a meaningful departure from hierarchical and technocratic models of education. When applied to legal education, critical pedagogy challenges students to view law not only as a set of rules but as a socially embedded and contested institution. It encourages them to interrogate power, identify injustice, and imagine alternative legal futures. This transformation is not just about what is taught, but how and why it is taught—and who gets to be part of the conversation.

Nevertheless, the road to reform is complex and fraught with resistance. Institutional conservatism, limited resources, and performative reform strategies threaten to dilute or delay progress. There is a persistent risk that global trends in legal education, if adopted uncritically, may undermine rather than support local innovation. Reforms that fail to challenge epistemic hierarchies or that simply add new content to old frameworks will not address the deep structural inequalities embedded in legal education systems.

To move forward, stakeholders in legal education—including educators, students, policy makers, and communities—must engage in sustained reflection and collaboration. Reform must be grounded in historical awareness, driven by local realities, and informed by global solidarity. Only by acknowledging the past and embracing alternative pedagogical possibilities can legal education in the Global South be transformed into a force for justice, empowerment, and social change. This article offers a foundation for that ongoing conversation and invites further inquiry into how law schools can serve as catalysts for a more equitable and inclusive legal order.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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