



INTEGRATING CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS INTO THE NIGERIAN LEGAL EDUCATION: A CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS APPROACH

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An era of climate crisis demands a climate conscious approach to address the multiple ways in which climate change is affecting everyone, including the legal profession. Education about the implication of climate change on legal practice is central to building the capacity of students and legal professionals. The marginal status of climate change law in Nigeria is undermining the importance of building generations of climate conscious lawyers with the skills to respond to the demands of climate change. Therefore, this paper examines the prospects of an integrated approach to climate change legal education in Nigeria. To achieve this, the paper adopts a doctrinal research approach for content analysis of primary and secondary sources. An integrated approach in this context entails incorporating climate change legal issues into the core law subjects such that students are also taught the climate context of the core law subjects. The paper argues that an integrated approach to legal education can help mainstream climate change issues into the core law curriculum. To address this, we propose two-layered approaches to integrating climate change legal considerations into the core law curriculum and law professional bodies. First, this requires that climate change legal issues are incorporated into the learning outcomes and assessments of core law subjects, such that students are at the same time taught the climate context of the core law subjects. Second, the Nigerian Bar Association also needs to integrate climate change considerations into its agenda as part of the continuous professional development for lawyers in Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The consensus within the scientific community is that climate change poses an existential threat to humanity and the natural environment. Its widespread impacts result in both economic and non-economic losses. This is why climate change is described as a scientific and social phenomenon.¹ Climate change is affecting all areas of human activity, and as such, it can no longer be seen as the sole concern of scientists.² It is in this context that the global response to address the climate crisis reflects a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach.³ At the heart of this global response is the role of law. While law is playing a critical role in defining the obligations of states on climate mitigation and adaptation, it is also transforming the legal practice.⁴

The devastating impacts of climate change and its multi-scalar dimension are transforming all aspects of human activity, including law and legal practice. Despite the increasing impacts of climate change across the globe, especially the Global South, climate change education remains low.⁵ As a result of this, there is general dearth of climate-conscious legal practice amongst the legal professionals.⁶ As climate change is both a present and future environmental problem, climate-conscious lawyers and law students need to develop skills and competencies to navigate the changing legal practice and to respond to the challenges occasioned by climate change.⁷

¹ K Bouwer et al, 'Climate Change isn't 'Optional': Climate Change in the Core Law Curriculum' (2023) 43 *Legal Studies* 240.

² B Preston, 'Climate Conscious Lawyering: Implementing a Climate Conscious Approach in Daily Legal Practice' (2021) *Australian Law Journal* 95.

³ J Peel et al, 'Climate Change Law in an Era of Multi-level Governance' (2012) 1 *Transnational Environmental Law* 245.

⁴ WG Lavey, 'Toolkit for Integrating Climate Change into Ten High-Enrollment Law School Courses' (2019) 49 *Environmental Law* 513.

⁵ T Ogboru, 'Environmental Education: Moving Environmental Law from Marginality to Mainstream' (2022) 2 *IJOLACLE* 83.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ J Dehn, and Z Nay, 'Mainstreaming Climate Change in Global Legal Education' in S. Ballakrishnen and B. Garth (eds.) *Research Handbook on Global Legal Education*.

Within the Nigerian context, climate change education remains at the fringes of the country's legal education.⁸ This explains why an average Nigerian lawyer does not prioritise developing skills and competency in climate change-related legal issues. This goes back to the foundation of legal education in Nigeria. The legal education in Nigeria is traditionally structured along established areas of practice, focusing on core subjects such as Criminal Law, Constitutional Law, Law of Contract, and so on. Environmental protection and, indeed climate change law are recent developments that are yet to be fully integrated into the core curriculum of legal education and national agenda.⁹ Two reasons have been identified for the dearth of climate-conscious lawyers in Nigeria. First, at the university level, climate change law is not recognised as a core law subject, implying that enrolment for it by students is optional.¹⁰ As a result, students have little motivation to enrol for it.

Second, there are fewer opportunities for climate law practice, resulting in limited demands by law firms. Therefore, students do not see prospects in developing capacity in the field of climate law.¹¹ However, as climate change is transforming all area of legal practice, scholars have called for climate consciousness amongst lawyers and law students as part of the strategies of responding to the varying ways in which climate change is impacting legal practice.¹²

In this paper, we argue that an integrated approach to legal education can help mainstream climate change issues into the core law curriculum, such that law students and lawyers are able to develop capacities, skills and competencies in the field of climate law and how climate change is transforming legal practice. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine how an integrated approach to climate change legal education in Nigeria can help build a generation of climate-conscious law students and lawyers. To

⁸ T. Ogboru (note 5 above).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ A Akeredolu, 'The Challenges of Developing and Teaching Climate Change Law in Nigerian Universities'. <https://www.iucnael.org/en/documents/72-alero-the-challenges-of-developing-and-teaching-climate-change-law/file> accessed on 15 August 2025.

¹¹ S Vaughan et al, 'Of Density and Decline: State of the Nation Reflections on the Teaching of Environmental Law in the UK' (2019) UCL Working Paper Series 19.

¹² K Bouwer et al. note 1.

achieve this objective, the paper adopts a doctrinal research approach for content analysis of relevant laws, caselaw and scholarly literature.¹³ The choice of doctrinal approach is informed by the research objective, which seeks to analyse how an integrated approach can be used to mainstream climate considerations into the core law curriculum.

An integrated approach in this context entails incorporating climate change legal issues into the core law subjects such that students are also taught the climate context of the core law subjects. The paper proposes two-layered approaches to integrating climate change legal considerations into the core law curriculum and law professional bodies. First, there is a need to integrate climate change education into the core law curriculum. This will essentially require that climate change legal issues are incorporated as part of the learning outcomes and assessments of core law subjects so that students are at the same time taught the climate context of the core subjects. Second, lawyers' associations like the Nigerian Bar Association also needs to integrate climate change considerations into its agenda as part of the continuous professional education for lawyers in Nigeria. This can help in capacity building of practicing lawyers.

2. CLIMATE CONSCIOUS LAWYERING

When John Kerry declares that 'you are all climate lawyers now, whether you want to be or not', he is merely acknowledging the role of lawyers in addressing the climate crisis.¹⁴ However, this would amount to nothing if legal professionals do not acquire skills, knowledge and competencies in the field of climate law. If climate change law remains at the fringes of the Nigerian legal education, as it is currently the case, it may be practically difficult to build next generation of lawyers with skills and competencies

¹³ For a detailed analysis of doctrinal methodology, see E Ekhaton and P Obani, 'Women and Environmental Justice Issues in Nigeria: An Evaluation' in J Dawuni (ed) *Intersectionality and Women's Access to Justice* (Lexington Books, 2022) 259- 283; I Dobinsons, and F Johns, 'Qualitative legal research' in M McConville and W Hong Chui (eds) *Research Methods for Law* (2nd ed, Edinburgh University Press 2017) 18 at 19; T Hutchinson, N Duncan, 'Defining and describing what we do: Doctrinal legal research' (2012) 17 Deakin L. Rev. 83.

¹⁴ K Sloan, 'You are all Climate Lawyers Now,' John Kerry tells ABA.' <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/you-are-all-climate-lawyers-now-john-kerry-tells-aba-2021-08-05/> accessed on 17 September 2025.

to engage with climate change legal and social issues and respond to their clients' climate-related needs. Therefore, 'all lawyers need to get on board the ship of climate-competent practice as the sea-level rises.'¹⁵

In a world that is constantly being transformed by climate change, clients need lawyers for expert guidance on volume of claims concerning issues with climate change components. Even though there are lawyers with climate or environmental law expertise, clients expect lawyers to have implied capacity to address all legal issues, including the climate components of their problems. This is both professional and ethical obligations of lawyers.¹⁶ Scholars believe that this expectation cannot be met by few climate or environmental law specialists.¹⁷ Therefore, all lawyers have professional obligation to acquire climate-related knowledge and skills, empowering them to better represent the climate-related interests of their clients and fulfil their professional obligations. This is why climate-conscious lawyering cannot be over-emphasised. Typically, climate-conscious lawyering requires having a generation of lawyers who not only understand the several laws of climate change, but also who are able to use the law to respond to the challenges and opportunities of climate change in their legal practice.¹⁸ Preston notes that a climate-conscious approach demands an 'active awareness of the reality of climate change and how it interacts with daily legal practice.'¹⁹

Nigeria, like the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, is facing the excruciating adverse effects of climate change.²⁰ However, public engagements with, and legal response, to climate change are only just emerging. Until recently, Nigeria's response to climate change has been under the banner

¹⁵ WG Lavey, 'Training all Law Students and Lawyers for Climate-Competent Representations.' Available at https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/content/documents/2020/training_all_law_students_and_lawyers_for_climate-competent-representations.pdf accessed on 17 September 2025.

¹⁶ B Preston, note 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ J Dehn and Z Nay, note 7.

¹⁹ B Preston, note 2. 52.

²⁰ CH Trisos, et al, 'Africa' In H O Pörtner et al, (eds) *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, 1285-1455 Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, (AR 6).

of the general environmental protection laws.²¹ The absence of a dedicated climate change law and institution for a long time meant that the government's response is limited and haphazard.²² However, over the years Nigeria has keyed into several international legal regimes on climate change, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, indicating its commitment to be part of the global efforts to address the climate crisis.²³ Also, as part of its commitment to address the climate crisis, Nigeria has enacted national law and policy, including the National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021-2030 and the Climate Change Act, 2021 (CCA), among others, joining the few countries in Africa to have a dedicated climate law.²⁴

The significance of these legal initiatives lies in their potential to promote climate change consciousness and accountability in Nigeria. Specifically, section 26 of the Climate Change Act directs the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC)²⁵ to partner and collaborate with agencies of government responsible for curriculum development on the 'integration of climate change into the various disciplines and subjects across all educational levels.'²⁶ According to Onuigbo,²⁷ the Climate Change Act has provided legal basis for the integration of 'climate consciousness into Nigeria's educational systems.'²⁸ Emphasizing this point, Ekhatior and Okumagba identifies two potential benefits of section 26 of the Climate

²¹ H Ijaiya, and OT Joseph, 'Rethinking Environmental Laws Enforcement in Nigeria' (2014) 5 Beijing Law Review 315.

²² U Etimere, 'The Future of Climate Change Litigation in Nigeria: COPW v. NNPC in the Spotlight' (2021) 2 CCLR 160.

²³ M T Ladan, 'Nigeria's Climate Change Act and Policy 2021 and the Future of Climate Litigation' (2022) NIALS Digest, Special Edition 8.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The NCCC is the primary government agency established to implement the provisions of the Climate Change Act, 2021. See section 3 of the Climate Change Act, 2021.

²⁶ Section 26 (1), (2) (a) (b) of the Climate Change Act, 2021.

²⁷ Hon. Sam Ifeanyichukwu Onuigbo was the lawmaker that sponsored the Climate Change Bill that was eventually passed into law in 2021. <https://www.climateparl.net/post/historic-climate-change-law-passes-in-nigeria> accessed on 17 September 2025.

²⁸ The Guardian, 'Onuigbo ties Climate Change Act to Educational Reform at deans' conference.' Available at <https://guardian.ng/news/onuigbo-ties-climate-change-act-to-education-reform-at-deans-conference/> accessed on 28 September 2025.

Change Act: it enhances climate change awareness and also provides basis for climate change litigation where the provisions of the Act are not met.²⁹

Also, the National Climate Change Policy, 2021 recognises climate change education and awareness as critical aspects of Nigeria's national response and policy measure to the impacts of climate change.³⁰ On the basis of this, the Federal Ministry of Education has recently released a 'Handbook on Climate Change Education for Schools in Nigeria'.³¹ The handbook is designed to support Nigerian educators in incorporating climate change education into their pedagogical practices, and also build a generation of 'climate-conscious leaders and change-makers'.³²

Understanding these climate laws and policies, and how they will implicate legal practice in Nigeria should be at the core of the responsibility of every lawyer. More importantly, the Nigerian climate change laws and policies place climate-related obligations on individuals and corporate entities. For instance, sections 22, 23 and 24 of the Climate Change Act, 2021 impose obligations on government agencies³³ and private entities³⁴ to establish a 'climate change desk' for the integration of climate change considerations into their core mandate; and designate a 'Climate Change Officer or 'Environmental Sustainability Officer' who shall be responsible for submitting annual report on a private entity's efforts to meet its climate mitigation and adaptation plan. The Act provides sanctions for failure to comply with these provisions.³⁵ Lawyers are not only expected to understand these climate related laws, but they

²⁹ E Ekhaton, and E Okumagba, 'Climate Change, and Multinationals in Nigeria: A Case for Climate Justice' in K Bouwer, et al. (eds) *Climate Litigation and Justice in Africa* (Bristol University Press, 2024) 247- 273, 265.

³⁰ Paragraph 6, 6.7, 7.4 of the National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021-2030. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/NIG209876.pdf> accessed on 17 September 2025.

³¹ Climate Change Education: Handbook for Schools in Nigeria (2025). Federal Ministry of Education. <https://ubec.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Updated-final-print-Climate-Change-Education-Handbook.pdf> accessed on 17 September 2025.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ministries, Departments and Agencies. Section 22 of Climate Change Act, 2021.

³⁴ Section 24 (1) CCA imposes climate-related obligation on 'any private entity with employees numbering 50 and above ...'

³⁵ Sections 22 (4 – 6), 23 and 24 (2) and (3), 34 of the Climate Change Act, 2021.

are also required to advise clients on the risks and benefits of (non)compliance with the laws.

The implication of this is that clients expect lawyers (not just environmental law specialists) to provide an all-encompassing legal service, including climate related obligations. Therefore, a climate-conscious lawyer is better placed to recognise the risks and opportunities in legal disputes with climate-related context. As Preston highlights, there are broad range of opportunities for climate conscious lawyers, including providing holistic legal advice to clients on relevant climate obligations, interpreting the climate laws to ascertain the correct legal rules that better promote climate change goals.³⁶

Also, climate litigation is growing across the world as one of the tools for climate governance. There are broad range of opportunities for Nigerian lawyers with climate-competent skills, especially in climate litigation. For instance, lawyers are needed to hold corporate entities liable for lack of, and inadequate disclosures of climate impacts and risks; liability for greenwashing; liability of fossil fuel corporate entities for contributing to climate change, governments' insufficient response on climate change mitigation and adaptation; environmental impact assessment of projects; and disputes over compensation and property rights of land owners arising from government's transition to low carbon energy sources, among others. Even though few climate-related cases have been litigated in Nigerian courts, it is not a reflection of the problematic situation of climate change in Nigeria.³⁷ Scholars have linked the paucity of climate suits in Nigeria to the general challenges of access to justice in courts.³⁸ One of these challenges is the absence of climate change consciousness amongst

³⁶ B Preston, note 2. 51-65.

³⁷ U Etimere, note 22.

³⁸ Y Suedi, and M Fall, 'Climate Litigation before the African Human Rights System: Prospects and Pitfalls' (2023) *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 146-159; TN Alatisé, 'Jurisdictional Problem in Environmental Litigation in Nigeria: Lessons from New South Wales' (2022) 30 (1) *IJUMILJ* 86; TN Alatisé, 'Common Law Approach to Environmental Litigation in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges' (2024) 11 (3) *NAU.JCPL*, 89 – 96. <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jcpl/article/view/3901> accessed on 17 September 2025.

the legal professionals due largely to lack of capacity in climate change issues.³⁹

However, as climate change continues to implicate all aspects of legal practice, the need for Nigerian lawyers to adopt a climate conscious approach in an era of climate crisis has never been more urgent. Therefore, the role of university law faculties and bar associations in developing climate-competent students and legal professionals cannot be overstated in this regard. However, it has been argued that the Nigerian Bar Association is yet to fully integrate climate change law and consciousness into its broader professional activities and agenda.⁴⁰ International body of lawyers such as the International Bar Association (IBA) have urged legal professionals across the world to adopt a climate conscious approach in responding to problems encountered in their daily legal practice.⁴¹ In its Climate Crisis Statement, the IBA highlights the need for lawyers to integrate climate conscious approach in advising their clients on the obligations and potential risks and liabilities arising from activities that contribute to climate change.⁴² IBA has also called on national law associations to put in place learning mechanism for lawyers to be taught climate change and its legal implications on their daily legal practice.⁴³ Bar associations have the responsibility to provide platforms for the education of its members on how climate change will impact their practice, and the potential opportunities for legal professionals.⁴⁴

Despite calls by law scholars for the integration of climate change education into the academic and professional activities of lawyers, there is evidence that law faculties and bar associations ‘have not stepped up to train all lawyers for practicing in climate change conditions.’⁴⁵ For

³⁹ T Ogboru, note 5.

⁴⁰ E Omiunu, ‘Is the Nigerian Bar Association ready to take the Lead’ <https://thenigerialawyer.com/is-the-nigerian-bar-association-ready-to-take-the-lead/> accessed on 15th August 2025.

⁴¹ International Bar Association, Climate Crisis Statement 2020. <https://www.ibanet.org/Climate-Crisis-Statement>. Accessed on 15th August, 2025.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ J Dehn and Z Nay, note 7.

⁴⁵ WG Lavey, ‘Training all Law Students and Lawyers for Climate-Competent Representations’

instance, in Nigeria and several developing countries, climate change education remains a marginal issue in the legal education curriculum.⁴⁶ Also, until recently in 2025, the Nigerian Bar Association has for a long time failed to integrate climate-conscious practice into its continuous professional education agenda for lawyers in Nigeria.⁴⁷

3. MARGINAL PERCEPTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE LAW

While climate change law is increasingly being integrated into the body of laws in many jurisdictions, it remains a marginal issue in many Global South countries, including Nigeria. In this context, marginality indicates that climate change law ‘sits at the fringes of the discipline of law, is inconsequential, and is seen as a luxury rather than an essential component of a good legal education.’⁴⁸ Emphasizing this point, Bouwer notes that climate change is still regarded as a ‘niche topic rather than a ‘socially pervasive issue.’⁴⁹ Exploring the British context, Fisher *et al* provide more insights into the marginal status of environmental law, and by extension climate change law.⁵⁰ They argued that specific factors such as relatively low number of environmental law scholars; low publication output in legal journals; and perceived disconnection of environmental law from mainstream legal scholarship, among others, have contributed to the marginality of environmental law.⁵¹ While these factors may be specific to

https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/content/documents/2020/training_all_law_students_and_lawyers_for_climate-competent_representations.pdf accessed on 17 September 2025.

⁴⁶ T. Ogboru, note 5.

⁴⁷ In February 2025, the President of the Nigerian Bar Association announced the composition of committees, including the NBA Climate Justice Committee. <https://blog.nigerianbar.org.ng/2025/02/04/nba-president-announces-appointment-and-composition-of-committees-to-drive-professional-excellence/> accessed on 17 September 2025.

⁴⁸ R Fowler et al, ‘From ‘Marginality’ to Mainstream’: The Evolution of Teaching and Learning in Environmental law’, in A Kennedy et al (eds), *Teaching and Learning in Environmental Law: Pedagogy, Methodology and Best Practice* (Edward Elgar, 2021) 8.

⁴⁹ K. Bouwer et al, note 1, 240.

⁵⁰ E Fisher, B Lange, E Scotford and C Carlarne, ‘Maturity and Methodology: Starting a Debate about Environmental Law Scholarship’ (2009) 21 (2) *Journal of Environmental Law* 213 at 223 – 224.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the British perspective, they also feature in other jurisdictions. Another important factor is the optional status of environmental law in the law curriculum, suggesting that it does not enjoy sufficient primacy in legal scholarship. Underscoring this point, Scotford and Vaughan observed that:

*Environmental law dominantly being an option suggest that it is an ‘extra’ to the core of legal learning, a ‘nice to have’ for students if they care about the environment and can forgo other subjects often perceived as more relevant for their future careers.*⁵²

It is important to point out that while the elective status of a subject may contribute to its marginality, it has been argued that it is difficult to assume that there is a direct nexus between the optional status of a subject and its marginality.⁵³ Ekhtor observes that ‘a major issue afflicting environmental law education is that it is not part of the mainstream legal education in many parts of the world.’⁵⁴ However, Fowler *et al* argue that subjects such as taxation, intellectual property law, human rights law, that are equally elective subjects have grown to become critical parts of mainstream legal scholarship.⁵⁵ Also, despite the elective status of environmental law, there are indications it is steadily progressing into an integral part of legal education in many parts of the world including some developing countries.⁵⁶

Arguably, the growth of environmental law in the developed countries is yet to be replicated in several emerging economies. It is unclear whether there is a nexus between the marginal status of environmental law and the

⁵² E Scotford and S. Vaughan, ‘Environmental Law and the Core of Legal Learning: Framing the Future of Environmental Lawyers.’ Available at <https://blog.oup.com/2018/10/environmental-law-core-legal-learning/> accessed on 17 September 2025.

⁵³ R Fowler *et al*, note 48.

⁵⁴ EO Ekhtor, ‘Strengthening the implementation of biodiversity treaties through environmental law education’ in DS Olawuyi and R Fakhri (eds) *Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Law and Policy Middle East and North African Region* (Cambridge University Press 2025) 338-360, 438.

⁵⁵ R Fowler *et al*, note 48.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*. For instance, universities in the United States, Western Europe, Brazil and South Africa have robust environmental law jurisprudence.

state of economic development of developing countries. However, the low environmental law scholarship in developing countries has been attributed to shortage of legal scholars with appropriate expertise in environmental law and the fact that environmental law remains a marginal subject within the legal curriculum in these countries.⁵⁷ On the other hand, it should be noted that environmental law teaching (and scholarship) has grown considerably over the years in Africa, especially in Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya, and key challenges such as shortage of environmental law scholars and resources are gradually being addressed.

Despite this, in many developing countries, the issue of sustainability and climate change action are only just emerging, compared to other critical but existential socio-economic problems facing these countries.⁵⁸ In the same manner, legal responses to the dangers of climate change and how to promote sustainability still remain marginal issues in the legal education.⁵⁹ As a result, there is growing population of law graduates, and indeed lawyers with little or no knowledge of climate change legal issues.

The marginality of climate change law will affect the development of climate-conscious lawyering. This is likely to affect the capacity of a Nigerian lawyer to take advantage of the opportunities available in the climate change governance. As climate change is implicating all areas of legal practice, regarding environmental law as optional subject in the legal education is no longer sustainable. Integrating climate change law into the core law curriculum can be the most effective approach to developing a new generation of climate conscious legal professionals that understand not just the legal framework on climate change but also appreciate how climate change and its legal response will transform their legal practice.

However, it is important to recognise that the growth of environmental law education, even as presently constituted, is facing serious setbacks. Akeredolu⁶⁰ and other scholars have identified some challenges, including inadequate environmental law teachers, wrong perceptions amongst students and lawyers, funding challenge, insufficient infrastructures, and

⁵⁷ R Fowler et al, note 48.

⁵⁸ T Ogboru, note 5. 86.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ A Akeredolu, note 10.

limited specialization, among others.⁶¹ This situation means that law students leaving universities will have little or no understanding of environmental law, and specifically climate change law. In a recent study conducted by this author, we found that overwhelming majority of lawyers have no knowledge about climate change law, and how it can be used to achieve climate justice.⁶² The responses from the lawyers interviewed reveal that there is dearth of climate conscious lawyers in Nigeria.⁶³ Additionally, we found that this lack of climate consciousness among lawyers means that many of them have not developed the requisite skills and competencies in climate law sufficient to integrate it into their legal practice. Effectively, many lawyers are missing out on the potential opportunities available in climate change governance.

4. FROM MARGINAL TO MAINSTREAM

As we have highlighted earlier, the primary factor hindering the growth of climate-conscious lawyering is that climate change law remains on the fringes of legal education. In Nigeria, environmental/climate change law is generally regarded as a specialized elective course rather than a socially pervasive issue that it is, deserving inclusion in the core law curriculum. This is further worsened by the fact that law students do not perceive future employability opportunities in environmental law practice. Consequently, climate change law education has been relegated to the margins of legal education. The reality is that there are few incentives for students to regard climate change law as a vital aspect of their studies and future legal practice.

However, recent developments across the world indicate that climate change education is moving from the fringe to the core of legal education.

⁶¹ A Babalola and D Olawuyi, 'Advancing Environmental Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education in Nigeria: Current Challenges and Future Directions' (2012) 13 *Sustainability* 10808; A A Akinsemolu and F V Arijeniwa, 'Current Trends in Sustainability Education and the Future of Sustainability Education in Nigeria' (2021) 12 (2) *JSDLP* 421 – 440.

⁶² This finding is part of the field work study on the ongoing doctoral research conducted by this author titled 'Barriers to Access to Justice in Courts for Victims of Climate Change in Nigeria' at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

⁶³ The NGOs interviewed states that majority of the Nigerian lawyers have not built capacity in climate change.

This is consistent with the understanding that climate change is transforming and implicating all areas of legal practice, and therefore it can no longer be seen as just a niche or specialised field.⁶⁴ Consequently, scholars have called for the integration of climate change law into the core of law curriculum as a way of building the capacity of future lawyers to respond to the multiple ways in which climate change is transforming legal practice.

Understanding what incorporating climate change education may look like in practice is also very important. For instance, Dehm and Nay⁶⁵ note that integrating climate education into the legal education curriculum means equipping students with knowledge about how climate change might impact different areas of law, how different areas of law might contribute to climate change and how they might address climate change.⁶⁶ This implies that beyond understanding the legal framework on climate change, law students and legal practitioners need to understand the social context of climate change and how it might implicate their legal practice.

Similarly, mainstreaming climate change legal issues into the core of the Nigerian legal education has the potential of equipping the next generation of lawyers with the requisite knowledge of climate change law and legal practice. Nigeria is already experiencing a high level of environmental illiteracy. Ogboru attributes this situation to the existing socio-economic challenges in the country, forcing many people to prioritise their daily subsistence. As a result, environmental consciousness is still very low compared to other critical issues of survival for the people. However, pushing environmental protection into the consciousness of the people will certainly require a deliberate effort to incorporate environmental education into the mainstream national agenda.

To achieve this, we propose two-layered approaches in which climate change education can be incorporated into the legal education in Nigeria. First, there is need to integrate climate change education into the core law curriculum. Integration here implies that climate change legal issues are

⁶⁴ K Bouwer *et al*, note 1. 240.

⁶⁵ J Dehn and Z Nay (note 7).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

incorporated as part of the learning outcomes and assessments of core law subjects so that students are at the same time taught the climate context of the core subjects. Second, lawyers' associations like the Nigerian Bar Association also needs to explicitly integrate climate change considerations into its agenda as part of the continuous professional development for lawyers in Nigeria. We shall discuss these approaches in detail below:

A. From Optional to Core Law Curriculum

Given the high level of environmental illiteracy in Nigeria, and especially amongst law students and lawyers, integrating climate education into the core law curriculum can be a starting point to developing and training climate conscious legal professionals. Along this line, it has been argued that such an arrangement can jump-start students' interest in learning about climate change and its implications on legal practice.⁶⁷ While the calls for mainstreaming climate change into the core law curriculum is gaining traction across the world,⁶⁸ the approaches to achieving it differ. For instance, Ogboru argues that environmental law, which is an elective for undergraduate law students should be made a compulsory subject.⁶⁹ According to Ogboru, core law subjects such as equity and trust, land law and commercial law may be unbundled and subsumed into related courses to accommodate environmental law as part of the core subject.

Even though Ogboru acknowledges the difficulty of such a major change, we do not share the view of unbundling the core law subjects to accommodate environmental law for two reasons. First, the core law subjects are foundational subjects that are considered fundamental for every law student to understand and to be acquainted with the basis and foundation of the Nigeria legal system. The core courses are designed to respond to the basic and unique needs of the Nigerian legal system, and so

⁶⁷ T Ogboru, (note 5 above) 86.

⁶⁸ UNESCO, 'Greening Curriculum Guidance: Teaching and Learning for Climate Action' (2024). Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future/curriculum#:~:text=Portuguese-,Greening%20curriculum%20guidance,Comprehensive%20and%20relevant> accessed on 15th August 2025.

⁶⁹ T Ogboru, note 5. 86.

law students are required to be taught these basic subjects to prepare them for their future legal practice. Second, unbundling the core subjects may create unintended consequences, such as disrupting their learning outcomes for students and instructors. For instance, in the Nigerian context, arguably the objectives and learning outcomes for Equity and Trust, and Land Law are unrelated, and so subsuming them into one could prove difficult and disruptive for students and law teachers. While we concede that emerging issues in the society will necessitate review of the core law curriculum from time to time,⁷⁰ we caution that such changes as advocated by Ogboru risk disrupting their learning outcomes.

More importantly, such an arrangement is likely to encounter institutional challenges, as the decision of whether a course should be regarded as compulsory or optional requires institutional approval.⁷¹ The scale of changes, both technical and administrative, that will be required to make climate change law a separate and core subject in law faculties may be onerous and controversial. In the same vein, the National Universities Commission (NUC) still has overwhelming control on core curriculum design in Nigeria, as can be seen in the recently released Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS).⁷² Additionally, the CCMAS for law programme has already designated Environmental Law as an optional/elective course.⁷³ It will therefore require the approval of the NUC to transition environmental law into a core law subject.

Before we go into the merit or otherwise of making environmental law a core subject, there is need to engage further with the ongoing debates on whether climate change law should be taught as a separate subject or integrated into the core law subjects. Proponents of an integrated approach argue that incorporating climate change into the core law subjects like land law, constitutional law, law of torts, corporate law, among others, can equip students with a comprehensive understanding and skills of how climate change is implicating these core law subjects.

⁷⁰ R. Fowler, et al, note 48. 8.

⁷¹ J Dehn and Z Nay, note 7. 11.

⁷² National Universities Commission: Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards for the Nigerian University System (CCMAS). 2022. Available at <https://nuc-cmmas.ng/download/ccmas-law/> accessed on 5 November 2025.

⁷³ Ibid. 53.

Also and more importantly, such an approach can help students develop climate conscious reasoning to apply legal principles and norms in the context of climate change in legal practice.⁷⁴ On the other hand, critics argue that such an approach may lead to overloading the curriculum of the core subjects, and in the process over working the students.⁷⁵ Again, such approach may not encourage the development of expertise in the field of climate change law and ultimately lead to shortage of climate change experts.⁷⁶

However, given the fact that climate change is implicating all areas of core law subjects and legal practice, it therefore follows that an integrated approach to climate change education can be better suited to teach students how climate change is implicating every aspect of the law. Integrating climate change into all the core law subjects can help students understand the extent to which climate change is transforming the core subjects, and how they can respond to these changes as law students and future lawyers. While it is good to promote the development of specialty and expertise in environmental or climate change law for students and lawyers who are interested, there is the general imperative to integrate climate change legal issues into core law subjects so that every student and lawyer is taught how climate change is implicating all aspects of the law. This approach will ensure that law educators factor climate change related legal issues into their pedagogical practices. This will give prominence to climate change as an integral part of the core subjects and shape students' perspectives on the seriousness of climate change.

This integrated approach is consistent with the 'embedding' strategy proposed by Dehm and Nay⁷⁷ to mainstreaming climate change considerations into the legal education. This entails 'formally' incorporating climate change related legal issues into the learning outcomes of core law subjects in ways that show that students learning the

⁷⁴ N Graham, 'Teaching Private Law in a Climate Crisis' (2021) 40 (3) *University of Queensland Law Journal* 403 – 419; K Bouwer et al. (note 1 above) 240.

⁷⁵ DM Ong, 'Prospects for Integrating an Environmental Sustainability Perspectives within the University Law Curriculum in England' (2016) 50 (3) *The Law Teacher* 276 – 299.

⁷⁶ WG Lavey, 'Toolkit for Integrating Climate Change into Ten High-Enrollment Law School Courses' (2019) 49 *Environmental Law* 513.

⁷⁷ J Dehn and Z Nay, (note 7 above). 11 – 14.

core subjects also have a ‘climate-focused learning objectives in mind.’⁷⁸ This approach ‘promotes the more formal and intentional introduction of climate related materials in a subject and fosters greater alignment between objectives, learning activities and assessment in the subject.’ In practice, law teachers may also require ‘students to do some reading of climate focused readings, engage in policy debates about how the law should best respond to a specific climate-related challenge, or provide legal advice based on a hypothetical factual scenario that involves some climate-related issue.’⁷⁹ Lavey⁸⁰ and Preston⁸¹ suggest that one way to help lawyers adopt a climate conscious approach is to ‘increase the salience of climate change issues in the teaching of not only elective environmental courses but also compulsory law courses such as property law, administrative law, tort law, contract law, and corporations law.’

While the potential challenges of an integrated approach cannot be dismissed, its benefits are considerably profound to the legal education in Nigeria. Given the high rate of climate change illiteracy amongst legal professionals in Nigeria, an integrated approach to climate change education can be a starting point to putting climate change concerns on the national prominence, and immersing climate consciousness in the students and lawyers. The current approach, where climate change legal issue is taught as a separate and optional/elective subject in the Nigerian law faculties does not help to put climate change issues on the national agenda. Also, such approach excludes significant numbers of students from developing interest in how climate-related issues will impact other aspects of law and practice. More importantly, the approach is likely to sustain the current trajectory of climate change law illiteracy amongst lawyers and students. Despite this, studies show that students would be interested in learning about climate change legal issues if it is integrated into the core law subjects, and not as an optional/elective subject.⁸² After all, the reality of climate change is not optional.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

⁸⁰ W G Lavey, (note 4).

⁸¹ B. Preston, (note 2).

⁸² K Bouwer et al, (note 1 above). 240.

- **Methodology for Integrating Climate Change Issues**

Given that climate change is implicating all aspects of core law subjects and practice, it implies that climate change legal issues should not be taught in isolation and optional in law faculties. In Nigeria, climate change legal issues can be incorporated into the curriculum of core subjects like land law, law of contract, constitutional law, law of torts, company/corporate law, among others, to teach students how climate change is influencing these areas of law and how they can apply the principles of law of the core subjects in the context of climate change legal issue. For instance, climate change is already affecting land use and planning, and allocation of land for fossil fuel extractions, as such students need to be exposed to the climate context of land use laws. Also, issues around climate risk disclosures are becoming a growing obligation of corporate entities, and government policy to discourage investments in fossil fuel business will certainly implicate core law subject like company law. Based on this, law instructors, especially those teaching core subjects need to first understand the context in which climate change legal issues can arise in their core subjects and then design seamless teaching methodology of integrating them into their pedagogical practices in order to empower students to understand the legal context of climate change.

Therefore, instructors in Nigerian law faculties can integrate climate change issues into the learning outcomes and assessment of the core subjects. This can be achieved using the ‘three basic but classic techniques for promoting more active learning in lectures’ proposed by Bach.⁸³ First, law lecturers can include climate change materials (such as climate-related cases, statutes, textbooks, articles, reports etc.) that intersect with the core subjects, as part of the pre-lecture reading materials so that students can read them in advance. This approach can help trigger their curiosity of the intersectionality of climate change and core subjects. Second, instructors can structure the lecturing period such that students do more of the talking than teachers, especially where pre-lecture readings have been assigned. Students are then engaged on their understanding of the core subjects in

⁸³ T Bach, ‘Techniques for Enhancing the Lecture Format in Teaching Environmental Law’ in A Kennedy et al. (eds), *Teaching and Learning in Environmental Law: Pedagogy, Methodology and Best Practice* (Edward Elgar, 2021). 83 – 95.

the context of climate change through a lecturing process that is students-centred and prioritises debates, demonstrations and solving hypothetical and real-life issues. Third, law teachers can allocate time for students to do self-reflection on what they have learned and how they have learned it, especially their understanding of how climate change will implicate the issues in the core subjects. This allows students to ‘capture their metacognition in a more concrete form and reread it over time.’⁸⁴

Apart from the benefits of an integrated approach to climate change education in Nigeria, such an arrangement may not require fundamental changes to the existing law curriculum. Furthermore, the NUC’s CCMAS has given universities some flexibility in the design of programmes to meet the specific needs of their region and community. The CCMAS expects law educators to be imaginative and innovative in their teaching pedagogy by factoring how recent developments across the world, such as climate change, are implicating substantive areas of core law subjects.⁸⁵ This will allow law instructors to integrate climate change issues into the objective and learning outcomes of their core subjects. Therefore, an integrated approach offers a more seamless arrangement to incorporating climate change to the core law curriculum in Nigeria.

B. Continuing Professional Development of Lawyers

One of the reasons for advocating for the integration of climate related legal issues into core law subjects is so that students enter their working life with the knowledge and competencies of how climate change is implicating the law and practice. However, practicing lawyers who do not have background in climate change also need to build capacity in climate law to position themselves for the potential opportunities in climate-related legal disputes. To this extent, Preston has called on lawyers to adopt a climate-conscious approach in their legal practice to appreciate the multiple ways in which climate change is transforming their profession.⁸⁶ Therefore, it has become imperative for lawyers to engage in a continuing

⁸⁴ Ibid 85.

⁸⁵ New Nigerian University Curriculum at a Glance. Independent Newspaper. Available at <https://independent.ng/new-nigerian-university-curriculum-at-a-glance/> accessed on 6 November 2025.

⁸⁶ B. Preston (note 2) 52.

professional development on climate-related issues. In this regard, lawyers' association have a critical role to play in equipping the current and next generations of lawyers with the skills and information to adopt a climate conscious approach in responding to their client's needs.

Recognising the implications of climate change for legal practice, lawyers' associations like the International Bar Association (IBA) have called on lawyers to develop capacity in climate change legal issues so they can better serve their clients' climate related needs. In its 'Climate Crisis Statement,' the IBA sets out its position on the role of the legal profession in responding to the climate crisis. IBA recognises the need for climate change to be incorporated into legal practice so that lawyers can adopt a climate conscious approach in advising their 'clients on the potential risks, liability, and reputational damage arising from activity that negatively contributes to the climate crisis.'⁸⁷ To achieve this, IBA recommends that bar associations around the world to develop 'practical educational tools' for lawyers to use in continuing their legal education. It also called for the establishment of committee on climate change, a platform for lawyers to engage with climate change issues. Bar associations can foster climate education through continuing professional development programmes for lawyers.⁸⁸

Despite these developments, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) is yet to fully integrate climate change legal issues into its broader professional agenda and activities.⁸⁹ With the rising impacts of climate change in Nigeria, and its implication on law and legal practice, the NBA must lead the way in addressing the multiple ways in which climate change is implicating the legal practice and create a platform to build capacity of its members, in line with the IBA directives. The NBA as the leading organisation of lawyers in Nigeria have critical role to play in integrating climate change into its activities and promote a climate conscious legal practice amongst its members. One of the ways of doing this is through

⁸⁷ International Bar Association, Climate Crisis Statement 2020. Available at <https://www.ibanet.org/Climate-Crisis-Statement>. Accessed on 15th August, 2025.

⁸⁸ WG Lavey, note 15. 16.

⁸⁹ E Omiunu, 'Is the Nigerian Bar Association ready to take the Lead.' <https://thenigerialawyer.com/is-the-nigerian-bar-association-ready-to-take-the-lead/> accessed on 15th August 2025.

the institutionalization of climate change legal programs within its framework agenda. The Institute of Continuing Legal Education (ICLE) of the NBA can drive these programmes by mainstreaming climate change into its educational programs.

However, recent developments indicate that the NBA is beginning to recognise the implication of climate action and sustainability issues. Acknowledging the urgency of the climate crisis and the responsibility of legal professionals to champion climate action and sustainability, the NBA recently established the NBA Climate Justice Committee to drive its climate change agenda, in line with the ‘climate crisis statement’ of the IBA.⁹⁰ Even though this is coming a bit too late,⁹¹ it is a step in the right direction.⁹² Beyond the formation of committee on climate change, the NBA must go further to embed climate change and sustainability into its core values and objectives. Through strategic collaborations with key stakeholders like the National Council on Climate Change and the Council of Legal Education, the NBA can influence government’s policy direction and implementation on climate change. Also, as part of its core values of promoting the rule of law and good governance, NBA can support strategic litigation and advocacy on behalf of victims of climate change in courts.

5. CONCLUSION

An era of climate crisis demands a climate conscious approach to address the multiple ways in which climate change is affecting everyone, including the legal profession. However, education about the implication of climate change on legal practice must be central to legal education. The marginal status of climate change law in Nigeria is undermining the importance of

⁹⁰ In February 2025, the President of the Nigerian Bar Association announced the composition of committees, including the NBA Climate Justice Committee. <https://blog.nigerianbar.org.ng/2025/02/04/nba-president-announces-appointment-and-composition-of-committees-to-drive-professional-excellence/> accessed on 17 September 2025.

⁹¹ IBA’s climate crisis statement was issued in 2020. NBA only formed the Committee on Climate Justice in 2025.

⁹² For example, this article is part of Special Issue on Legal Education initiated by the Legal Education Committee of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in collaboration with the Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy.

building generations of climate conscious lawyers with the skills to respond to the demands of climate change. To address this, we have proposed two-layered approaches to integrating climate change legal considerations into the core law curriculum of law faculties and called on NBA to incorporate climate change education into its agenda. The challenges and opportunities of a climate transformed world are already here, and lawyers must develop competencies to participate in it.