

REMARKS AT
BENCH, BAR AND FACULTY CONFERENCE,
2021 LEGAL YEAR

**THEME: Professional Development in a Virtual World—
Emerging Trends and Best Practices**

8th - 9th April 2021

By Prof. Raymond Akongburo Atuguba,
Dean, University of Ghana School of Law

8th April 2021

ADDRESS VOCATIVE

Representative of the Chief Justice of the Republic of Ghana, Justice Paul Baffoe-Bonnie [Kwesi Anin Yeboah];

Their Lordships, Justices of the Superior Courts of Judicature;

The Hon. Minister for Justice and Attorney-General, Hon. Godfred Yeboah Dame;

President of the Ghana Bar Association, Mr. Anthony Forson Jnr.;

Plenary Speaker, Prof. Philip Ebow Bondzie-Simpson;

Colleague Deans and Lecturers of Law Faculties in Ghana;

Other judges

Colleague Lawyers

Invited Guests;

Media Operatives;

Ladies and Gentlemen...

INTRODUCTION

I thank you for this opportunity to give a few remarks, on behalf of the ever-growing Faculties of Law in Ghana, and at the beginning of an important gathering of the Bench, Bar and Faculty to deliberate on matters that affect our common veal.

The theme for this gathering “Professional Development in a Virtual World—Emerging Trends and Best Practices”, is not only important, it is determinative of the future of legal training and professional development in the decades to come.

As part of the Faculty, I will, naturally, contain my remarks within the reality of the new normal for our branch of the legal profession.

In this regard, I wish to make three contributions to the theme for this conference:

1. The first is that Virtual Teaching and Learning should be complementary to traditional in-person teaching and learning.
2. The second contribution I wish to make as already noted by the Acting Chief Justice for this session is that, Virtual Teaching and Learning requires heavy investment in ICT infrastructures, of a kind we have not seen before in our Law Faculties.
3. The final contribution I will make is that an appropriate Blend of Traditional and Virtual methods of teaching and learning implicates a refreshing of the teaching and learning curriculums and methodologies that we have been comfortable with in the last 60 years.

VIRTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING SHOULD BE COMPLEMENTARY, AN AUXILIARY TEACHING AND LEARNING METHOD

The first suggestion I seek to convey to you today is that virtual teaching and learning should be complementary to traditional teaching and learning methods in Law Faculties.

Put another way, traditional modes of teaching law should remain the main forms of instruction and learning.

We must remember that the legal profession is a profession, and professional training always implicates apprenticeship; and it is difficult for real apprenticeship to occur completely via long distance or virtual training.

Again, some of the learning that we want for our students to pick up- observing the countenance of a witness, assessing the truthfulness of a witness, anticipating the arguments from the other side, real advocacy that utilizes all the senses-are really difficult to do virtually. For a year, we have taught virtually, often with our videos turned off, not seeing our students, not knowing if they are listening, not able to judge from their countenances if they understand, or from their general disposition if they need extra help. The avenues for fully observing students' composure, demeanor and reactions, as is required for a full evaluation of the would-be lawyer, are simply not fully available in virtual learning.

Also, the task of training a lawyer invariably involves observing the would-be lawyer closely, both in and outside the classroom. The virtual experience falls short of the imperative that the lawyer in training is seen in action and in behavior in a suitable setting and environment, in order to judge their temperature, composure, poise, and demeanor in our rather unique calling that requires the best of manners and calm in the most vexing situations.

It is for these reasons that many top law schools around the world are planning to go back to the traditional modes of instruction next academic year.

I must quickly add that virtual teaching and learning should be an indispensable complement to traditional modes of instruction. Thus, legal education is not complete without virtual teaching and learning. Our students must be able to join classes taking place around the world; access law material from around the globe virtually; and interact with teachers and other students from all over the world virtually, in order to obtain a well-rounded and truly global legal education.

To conclude on this first point, the pandemic compulsorily moved law teaching from the physical classroom onto virtual platforms. And after a year of virtual teaching in Ghana, I am convinced that effective law teaching requires both lecturer and student to share the same physical space and presence most of the time.

I am further convinced, after a year of virtual teaching, that the traditional modes of instruction stand to gain a lot if they accommodate aspects of virtual teaching and learning. In other words, a mixed, hybrid method of teaching law, involving the two methods, the Traditional and the Virtual, should be adopted, even post pandemic.

I have been the greatest advocate for virtual learning of the law in Ghana. I am happy that the new Attorney General thinks same for the Attorney General's Chambers.

I, however, maintain that virtual teaching and learning should remain a complement, even if an indispensable complement, to the traditional, main and standard modes of teaching and learning the law.

Though inadequate by itself, virtual teaching has the potential of optimizing the traditional teaching methods. The two methods, therefore, would be best for the training of the Ghanaian lawyer in the twenty-first century if properly blended.

Now to the second point I seek to make today:

VIRTUAL LEARNING ENTAILS UNPRECEDENTED HEAVY INVESTMENT IN ICT INFRASTRUCTURE BY LAW FACULTIES

In several instances in the University of Ghana, for example, the internet connection was not stable, pausing and interrupting the flow of lectures. The cause of the fluctuating internet connectivity was traced to rats that ate the optical-fiber cable.

Even after rectifying the problem, we are now trying to extend a fibre-optic cable by a private company from an area on the University's campus to our Law Faculty. This is to provide a back-up fibre internet option to the unstable university fibre option and the 3 private wireless back-up systems we have installed.

These and other challenges subtracted substantially from the quality of the teaching and learning experience this past semester.

There is no escaping the fact that Law Faculties in Ghana must immediately generate the millions of Ghana cedis that are needed to lay the appropriate ICT infrastructure for training the lawyers of the 21st Century. Please remember this when we come to you, beginning this month, for your contributions as alumni, to these and other endeavours.

The last point I seek to convey today is on

THE NEED TO REFRESH CURRICULUMS AND TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Blending the Traditional and Virtual Teaching Methods requires changes to the curriculums and to teaching methodologies.

1. We need to urgently revise Course Outlines and re-evaluate and re-structure their content to accommodate the two teaching methods.
2. We need to revise the Reading Lists, from the assumption that virtual learning means that material from around the world is accessible to students.
3. We need to develop Standard Textbooks; law lecturers must be awarded research grants to produce these books immediately, in order to bring life to the dry Course Outlines and Reading Lists.
4. We urgently need to refresh our Teaching Methodologies, for it cannot be that the same inherited methodologies are still the very best after sixty years, and in a situation where virtual teaching is being mainstreamed; and
5. Finally, we need to modify the training and orientation of Law Teachers, ensuring that they are open-minded, willing to embrace change for the better, and a blend of the two modes of teaching.

We hope to discuss all of these matters I have detailed here at our impending Conference on the Future of Legal Education in Ghana, to which you are all invited; at the Conference of Law Deans, to which only the high table will be invited; and at the Law Teachers Conference, to which only Law Lecturers will be invited. Because Faculty are tasked with the primary responsibility of implementing any teaching methods adopted at these prior conferences, it is expedient that they be consulted in every step of this renewal and rejuvenating process.

CONCLUSION

My Lord the Acting Chief Justice, Your Lordships, Hon. Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Plenary Speaker, Esteem Guests, Media, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I thank you for your attention.