

Towards Sustainable Legal Education Reform: Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Approaches in Albania's Justice System

Adrian LEKA

“Luigj Gurakuqi” University of Shkodër
Shkoder, Albania

Brunilda HAXHIU

University of New York Tirana
Tirana, Albania

ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of public legal education as part of Albania's broader justice system reform process and highlights the challenges that were faced in its implementation. Legal education has been recognized as essential for building trust in justice institutions and promoting civic participation, however, Albania's reform efforts have struggled to bring visible and measurable outcome for the strategic goals. The article identifies gaps in the current approach, including the lack of mechanisms for assessing public legal awareness and the absence of clear institutional coordination for legal education initiatives. The article employs a interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lens, in order to advocate for combining various fields such as law, social sciences, and education to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of public legal education. We explore how interdisciplinary communication could improve the distribution of legal information, and we emphasize the need for legal education programs that are open to people from diverse cultures and educational backgrounds. Additionally, we propose a transdisciplinary approach that would help align legal education with society's goals at large, including social justice and civic participation, which can lead to a better inclusion of citizens in the justice system and political decision-making. At the end, the article calls for a consistent, sustainable strategy that includes legal education as part of a comprehensive national framework, which would ensure long-term results and visible outcomes towards a more informed society. We recommend that Albania can build a culture of legal awareness that strengthens the public trust in the legal system and supports democratic values, through continued investment in resources, institutional capacity, and collaboration across sectors.

Keywords: Transdisciplinary Approach, Interdisciplinary Approach, Legal Education, Albania, Justice System.

1. CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

The 'notion of education' functions as a unifying and flexible concept that fosters interdisciplinary communication by bridging diverse perspectives, disciplines, and cultural contexts. It encompasses explicit meanings and implicit associations, aligning individual growth with broader societal, ethical, and institutional objectives. Education transcends knowledge transfer, serving as a transformative tool for critical thinking, adaptability, and collaboration across boundaries. This adaptability is vital for addressing complex challenges and creating a shared understanding among diverse stakeholders.

Albania's public legal education reform illustrates the practical application of this notion. Aimed at improving public understanding of legal systems and fostering trust in justice institutions, the reform sought to promote civic engagement and strengthen democratic values. However, challenges such as unclear institutional responsibilities, resource limitations, and insufficient public outreach hindered progress. Addressing these issues requires interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches that integrate diverse knowledge systems and cultural contexts, ensuring legal education becomes more inclusive, relatable, and effective.

By aligning education strategies with societal goals and fostering sustainable outcomes, the reform highlights the importance of shared frameworks in interdisciplinary communication. This case underscores the notion of education as an adaptable, transformative force capable of uniting theory, practice, and context to address societal needs collaboratively and inclusively.

2. INTRODUCTION

Legal education plays a crucial role in building strong societies and enhancing democratic values [21,27.] In Albania, the reform of public legal education has been a key component of the broader justice reform process. Like other reforms in this context, its main aim is to address the public's limited understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities [2.] This understanding is essential for fostering trust in justice institutions and encouraging greater public participation [12.]

This study highlights concerns about the systematic implementation of legal education reforms in Albania, particularly the gap between the stated objectives and the realistic outcomes. It examines judicial reform efforts related to legal education through both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lenses, emphasizing the need for integrated solutions that extend beyond traditional approaches to legal education

To achieve justice and build public trust in the legal system, the dissemination of legal information is essential [1.] Albania's justice reform has prioritized the development of robust public legal education to address the widespread lack of understanding of the legal system [2.] This article critically reflects on Albania's approach, advocating for the integration of interdisciplinary communication and transdisciplinary methods in education and research to foster sustainable outcomes.

3. LEGAL EDUCATION AS PART OF JUDICIAL REFORM IN ALBANIA

The 2019–2020 Strategic Plan for the Judicial System in Albania began with an oft-misattributed Goethe quote¹ [2,] reflecting the justice reform's ambitious but ultimately unfulfilled promises [23.] The reform stemmed from the 2015 Analysis of the Justice System [24] and the subsequent Justice System Reform Strategy and Action Plan [25.]

The justice reform recognized legal education as a pillar of a functional legal system. Public legal knowledge enhances the interaction between citizens and state agencies, reduces conflicts, and promotes law-abiding behavior [24.] However, the Analysis of the Justice System identified major gaps, including the absence of a national legal education strategy, institutional oversight, and coordination between state and civil society actors. Legal education in Albania had been largely dependent on donor-funded civil society initiatives. Despite these observations, the findings were not supported by relevant sources in the Analysis, but actually seemed a reading of the situation by the experts that drafted the analysis [2.]

The reform's legal education goals included enhancing public awareness of rights and obligations, training citizens to navigate the legal system, and increasing legal professionals' involvement. Recommended actions included media campaigns, legal information materials, and dedicated legal education websites [24.] The subsequent Justice System Reform Strategy set legal education as a key objective, advocating for its inclusion in school curricula and public outreach efforts [25.]

Public legal education was formally addressed in the 2019 National Strategy for Public Legal Education (SELP) [26.] The strategy, developed alongside the justice reform, sought to expand legal education beyond schools to the broader public. A High-Level Expert Group conducted research and consultations to design the strategy.

SELP established the following strategic goals for years 2019 – 2023:

1. Improvement of the institutional organization and functioning in offering public legal education.
2. Guarantee and strengthen effective institutional cooperation at local, regional and national level for the realization of public legal education.
3. Ensure effective and efficient performance of public and independent institutions, the media and civil society.
4. Awareness of the public regarding the importance of knowing the law, their rights and obligations, based on specific needs and on the promotion of civic activism [26.]

4. CHALLENGES IN THE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO LEGAL EDUCATION

Each strategic goal in SELP was followed by measures for their implementation. The performance indicators were primarily based on the number of legislative actions, memorandums, and training or informative sessions. However, SELP lacked indicators to measure the public's actual understanding of the law

and their legal rights and obligations. This gap was a real obstacle to the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the envisioned goals and actions, and to put forward arguments for further improvements. For example, while the number of sessions or legislative actions might be used as an indicator that legal education related activities have been carried out, they do not indicate any measurable change in the level of legal awareness of the public, which was one of the main objectives of the strategy.

A major shortcoming of the strategy is also the lack of clear arguments as to how the listed actions will contribute to a better understanding of the law by the public. Without establishing a clear connection between the actions taken and measurable improvements in legal knowledge, it is difficult to assess whether the strategy will meet its intended goals. Furthermore, SELP does not include indicators to evaluate the institutional resources required to carry out these actions. A complete strategy should include an assessment of the capacity of the responsible institutions to implement the proposed measures effectively [10, 11.] This would ensure that the strategy's objectives are realistic and achievable within the existing framework. An effective strategy would aim to achieve results in practical terms, avoiding excessive provisions and preventing the overloading of the institutions tasked with implementation [3.]

Despite significant donor funding, monitoring reports on justice reform have shown that legal education efforts have largely stalled. By 2019, the only progress reported was the drafting of SELP itself [28.] Higher legal education reforms, such as integrating legal training into university curricula, were not implemented due to the absence of necessary regulatory frameworks. The 2020-2022 reports echoed these concerns, noting persistent delays and the failure to operationalize key reform measures [29, 19.] This inaction is a significant issue, as it suggests a disconnect between the strategic goals and the reality of their implementation.

The Strategic Plan for the Judicial System and its Reforms emphasized the need to increase the involvement of the public in legal matters, including the legal education of the population. However, the realization of these goals faced other significant challenges, such as the lack of consensus over the institutions that would take the responsibility for implementing and monitoring the measures related to legal education. This lack of clarity led to inaction, as no single authority has been able to take ownership of the process [29, 19.] Additionally, many of the objectives outlined in the action plan proved to be difficult to achieve because they or the authority was not clearly defined and the needed resources were not allocated. This gap between the plan's ambitious goals and the reality of available resources undermined the potential success of the reforms.

Furthermore, the political debate significantly hindered the justice reform process, especially after the constitutional amendments in 2016. Between 2016 and 2019, the implementation of the reforms was slow, with most efforts focused on vetting judges and prosecutors rather than addressing broader legal education initiatives [14.] Legal education was not considered a priority in that situation, despite its inclusion in the initial reform framework [15, 16.] This shift in focus reflects the political climate in the country at that time, where carrying forward the approved judicial reform, especially vetting and the

¹ 'Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!'

establishment of the new justice institutions, was seen as more of a priority than addressing the underlying issues within the legal education system.

Proposed amendments to higher education laws, such as the introduction of a five-year integrated law degree and a mandatory bar exam, were repeatedly withdrawn due to academic resistance [16.] This resistance is symptom of a bigger issue: the legal profession in Albania continues to suffer from a lack of academic rigor, widespread conflicts of interest among law professors, and an oversupply of law graduates. These systemic issues have contributed to diminishing public trust in both legal education and the legal profession, which has further complicated the justice reform process.

Moreover, the coverage of justice reform in the Albanian media has been problematic, with journalists struggling to accurately report on the complicated new system architecture, which has led to misinformation and public confusion [4.] The political debates surrounding the reform have further impacted negatively the public trust, with the ruling party promoting the reform as a major achievement, while opposition parties dismiss it entirely [15.] This polarized narrative has contributed to a fragmented public understanding of the reform's aims and outcomes, limiting the potential for broad-based support necessary for meaningful change.

5. INTERDISCIPLINARY COMMUNICATION IN LEGAL EDUCATION

We have seen how public engagement in legal matters becomes significant to the society. Interdisciplinary communication offers some solutions to the issue of barriers surrounding effective legal education and public law awareness programs [9.] The use of interdisciplinary communication at legal educational institutions allows different disciplines of law to join forces with education and social sciences while interacting with public policy thus making legal reforms more effective.

Our main concern earlier focused on the debatable question about which entities should control the advancement and management of legal education and public awareness strategies. Legal scholars, educators and policymakers must cooperate in interdisciplinary teams to create organized strategies for reform. The combination of various types of expertise, such as communications, education and legal, will enable the creation of an integrated approach for public legal education. Through these measures the delivery of legal information can become accurate as well as easy for the public to comprehend and remain interested in [9.]

Communication experts have proven knowledge which can optimize public outreach of legal information by delivering content both effectively and in approaches that maintain audience interest [5.] Media specialists should collaborate with public legal education groups to create educational initiatives which maximize the use of social media and television alongside public service announcements. The extended dissemination approach would advance legal content accessibility which would reduce complicated professional legal terminology that deter public understanding of their legal rights and obligations [17.]

Educational psychologists along with sociologists should participate in designing legal education programs because their involvement would create curricula which match diverse

learning needs and adapt to cultural and social delivery environments [30.] Multi-faceted educational approaches combined with social understanding help guarantee that legal information reaches the public while it stays with them on a significant level.

Interdisciplinary communication strategies should be implemented because they would help resolve the resource limitations found in existing legal education structures. Law schools, together with legal institutions, should build alliances between universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international development agencies to combine their resources and expertise. The partnership between institutions enables both minimized financial weights and increased accessibility of legal education through limited resources.

6. TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Interdisciplinary collaboration grows stronger through transdisciplinarity, which brings together different types of knowledge, real-life experiences, and cultural perspectives [6.] This approach goes beyond traditional academic boundaries to create inclusive and practical frameworks that fit specific contexts. Public law education should follow this method to reach diverse audiences by presenting legal concepts in ways that resonate with their cultural backgrounds.

A transdisciplinary approach places legal education within the cultural realities of its audience, making it feel relevant rather than disconnected from everyday life [20.] This means incorporating local traditions and values to simplify legal concepts and make them more relatable. Instead of just teaching laws and regulations in isolation, legal education should show how they apply to real-life situations, such as family law, property rights, or criminal justice. By linking the law to people's daily lives, they can better understand both their rights and responsibilities.

Using transdisciplinary methods in legal education also helps promote social justice [8.] By combining insights from different fields—such as economics, politics, and social justice—this approach can highlight major issues like gender inequality, poverty, and discrimination. Legal education plays a key role in shaping a fair society, and when it embraces transdisciplinarity, it becomes a powerful tool for extending justice beyond the courtroom and into everyday life [7.]

Grassroots organizations play a vital role in this process. They deeply understand the challenges faced by local communities [22] and can help design legal education programs that address real needs. When these organizations collaborate with legal experts, policymakers, and educators, they can create flexible and accessible legal education initiatives [13.] This approach encourages community involvement, as residents actively contribute to shaping the legal education that affects them.

In Albania, adopting transdisciplinary approaches would help address challenges in public outreach and community participation within legal reforms. By involving a range of stakeholders—experts, community leaders, activists, and academics—Albania could develop legal education programs that better reflect its social landscape. This would lead to more meaningful initiatives, strengthen public trust in the legal system, and encourage active civic engagement.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Albania's experience highlights the significant challenges of reforming public legal education during a period of justice system transition. While the country has made progress, its efforts have been inconsistent, largely due to a lack of sustained focus on legal education. By improving communication across disciplines and adopting transdisciplinary approaches, Albania can bridge these gaps and build a more effective and lasting legal education system. These strategies would not only improve public understanding of the law but also help create a more inclusive society with stronger protections for vulnerable groups. A well-structured framework that connects legal education with cultural, educational, and policy reforms is essential for meaningful change.

Although justice reform initially gained strong political support, its momentum has faded over time [14.] While the reform process has shaped public perceptions of the justice system, the failure to prioritize legal education has weakened its long-term impact. To ensure future reforms succeed, Albania must move beyond political rhetoric and focus on concrete actions. This requires a structured, well-funded approach that aligns with institutional capacities and measurable goals. Strengthening legal awareness and public trust in the justice system is crucial to reinforcing democracy and social cohesion.

In conclusion, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches provide valuable frameworks for revitalizing public legal education in Albania. By incorporating diverse perspectives and ensuring legal education is culturally relevant and socially engaged, these strategies can make legal education more effective, inclusive, and sustainable. This approach will not only enhance public understanding of the law but also help create a more transparent, responsive, and just legal system—one that meets the needs of Albanian citizens and supports long-term social progress.

8. REFERENCES

- [1] A. B. Pitts, N. G. Lawrence, and S. C. Shenkman, **Rebuilding public trust and confidence in the legal system...through education**, Fla. Bar J., vol. 74, no. 1, pp. 12–19, 2000.
- [2] A. Leka, **The (failed) effort for a systematic approach to legal education in Albania**, in Proc. 12th Int. Multi-Conf. Complexity, Informatics Cybernetics (IMCIC 2021), 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.iiis.org/CDs2021/CD2021Spring/papers/ZA803NK.pdf>.
- [3] Albanian Helsinki Committee, **Opinion and suggestions on SELP**, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://ahc.org.al/disa-mendime-dhe-sugjerime-te-komitetit-shqiptar-te-helsinkit-per-projektin-per-strategjine-e-edukimit-ligjor-te-publikut-ne-republiken-e-shqiperise/>.
- [4] Albanian Media Institute, **Raportimi i medias mbi Reformën në Drejtësi, prill–qershor 2019**, 2019.
- [5] American Bar Association, **How to improve lawyer and client communications**, Business Law Today, Nov. 2023. [Online]. Available: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/business_law/resource/s/business-law-today/2023-november/how-to-improve-lawyer-and-client-communications/.
- [6] B. Nicolescu, **Manifesto of transdisciplinarity**, K.-C. Voss, Trans. SUNY Press, 2002.

- [7] C. D. Cunningham, **Advancing social justice through an interdisciplinary approach to clinical legal education**, Wash. Univ. J. Law Policy, vol. 14, pp. 101–146, 2004.
- [8] C. Halpern, **Making waves and riding the currents: Activism and the practice of wisdom**, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008.
- [9] D. L. Borman and C. Haras, **Something borrowed: Interdisciplinary strategies for legal education**, J. Legal Educ., vol. 68, no. 2, pp. 357–384, 2019.
- [10] E. Ostrom, **Background on the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework**, Policy Stud. J., vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 7–27, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2010.00394.x>.
- [11] Eric Institute of Education Sciences, **Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT)**, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED610164.pdf>.
- [12] E. R. Smith, **Legal awareness and its role in promoting public trust and participation**, J. Legal Educ. Reform, vol. 12, no. 3, 2023.
- [13] Grassroots Justice Network, **How to develop a community paralegal program** [Online]. Available: <https://grassrootsjusticenetwork.org/resources/developing-a-community-paralegal-program/>.
- [14] Institute for Political Studies, **Bilanci 2018–2019: Monitorim, analizë, problematike**, 2019.
- [15] Institute for Political Studies, **Reforma në drejtësi në këndvështrimin e studentëve**, 2020.
- [16] Institute for Political Studies, **Media, politika dhe reforma në drejtësi: Monitorim i ligjërimit publik të reformës në drejtësi**, 2020.
- [17] Marlia et al., **Plain Language Intervention to Improve Public Understanding of Legal Language: Descriptive Analysis of Controversial Articles in The Job Creation Law**, J. Law Sustain. Dev., vol. 12, no. 2, p. e3224, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v12i2.3224>.
- [18] Ministry of Education and Science, **Dokumenti i Strategjisë së Zhvillimit të Arsimit Parauniversitar 2014–2020**, 2014.
- [19] Ministry of Justice, **Monitoring reports for SELP, 2020, 2021 and 2022**. [Online]. Available: <https://www.drejtesia.gov.al/raportet-e-monitorimit-v-shqip/>.
- [20] N. Proctor, **Educational psychology and curriculum design: A child-centered approach**, Educ. Stud., vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 151–158, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305569850110206>.
- [21] S. S. Kumar and P. Thekkanath, **Civic competence: The essential role of legal education in primary and secondary schools**, Int. J. Res. Publ. Rev., vol. 5, no. 9, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://ijrpr.com/uploads/V5ISSUE9/IJRPR33342.pdf>.
- [22] The Elders, **Grassroots organizations are essential to empowering the communities they serve**, Dec. 7, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://theelders.org/news/grassroots-organisations-are-essential-empowering-communities-they-serve>.
- [23] The High Judicial Council, **The strategic plan for the judicial system 2019–2020**. [PDF]. [Online]. Available: <http://klgj.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Plani-Strategjik-i-KLGJ-se-per-sistemin-Gjyqesor-2019-2020-versioni-shqip-1.pdf>.
- [24] The Parliament of Albania, **Decision of the Special Parliamentary Commission, No. 14, dated 30.07.2015, on the approval of the analysis of the justice system, 2015**. [Online]. Available:

http://www.reformanedrejttesi.al/sites/default/files/dokument_i_shqip_0.pdf.

- [25] The Parliament of Albania, **Decision of the Special Parliamentary Commission, No. 15, dated 30.07.2015, on the approval in principle of strategy and action plan for the reform of the justice system in Albania, 2015.** [Online]. Available:
https://reformanedrejttesi.al/sites/default/files/draft_strategjia_versioni_shqip.pdf.
- [26] The Parliament of Albania, Decision No. 47/2019, on the approval of the national strategy for public legal education, 2019. [Online]. Available:
<https://www.parlament.al/Files/Akte/20190424122731vendim%20nr.%2047.%20dt.%2018.4.2019%20-Teksti%20i%20Strategjise.pdf>.
- [27] UNESCO, Strengthening the rule of law through education: A guide for policymakers, 2019. [Online]. Available:
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366771>.
- [28] University of Tirana, Faculty of Law, Monitoring of the implementation of the justice reform, 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/raport-monitorimi-i-zbatimit-te-reformes-ne-drejttesi.pdf>.
- [29] University of Tirana, Faculty of Law, **Monitorimi i masave për reformimin e arsimit juridik dhe edukimit ligjor të publikut, 2020.**
- [30] Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, **Guide to curriculum units by fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.** [Online]. Available:
<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/guides/2019/>.