

2024- CLINICAL APPROACH IN LEGAL EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The clinical approach in teaching law subjects is one of the most important and useful pedagogical methods and thus a crucial area of research in order to deliver knowledge pertaining to legal studies effectively. Based on some research, the clinical approach in legal education is also referred to as the CLE (clinical legal education). The CLE serves to enhance a student's critical thinking skills, the application of substantive legal principles to real-life scenarios, information gathering and research in formulating a hypothesis and legal solutions. It is said that the CLE enables law students to understand and assimilate responsibilities as members of public service in the administration of justice, upholding the rule of law and equitable distribution of justice in the society. This research examines the definition of CLE, its aim, significance and challenges. It is submitted by this research that the CLE plays a major role in developing the full potential of law students in utilizing their legal knowledge learned in theoretical classes.

Keywords: clinical legal education, teaching method, law.

INTRODUCTION

In legal pedagogy, two methods are often used in delivering lectures by legal educators and to enrich law students with knowledge and skills. Not less, in most universities the Socratic method is still vastly in use. However, to confer legal knowledge and skills only by means of the Socratic method is just inadequate. A Law School or Law Faculty has to ensure that their students are also being equipped with the legal skills in professional practice. This study is conducted in order to unearth some aspects pertaining to clinical legal education or legal clinics. Clinical legal education is commonly conducted in some forms such as mootings, client counselling and legal drafting.

Every single time a law student enters a law lecture classroom he expects to gain legal knowledge at the optimum. Learning and knowing the legal theories and applying them using the Socratic method is inarguably beneficial to a law student's learning. Ordinary practice is that a law student is given a set of facts containing legal issues. Students are required to analyse these facts and ascertain therefrom the legal issues. Using the legal theories and decided authorities he had learnt during lecture he will then attempt to solve the legal issues. To express his final evaluation of any of the legal issues he will provide a conclusion. Although intellectually this would teach and train law students to acquire and constantly exercise their critical thinking skills, the method still lacks any real hands-on experience. This is where the practical aspect of learning comes into play. This is the rationale of needing to have a proper set of legal curriculum which is balanced in providing both theories of the law and the practical of the law.

It is common in many jurisdictions that law students would have to engage in not only theoretical classrooms to study the laws but to undergo a period of practical learning known as the attachment program. This could be done at legal related departments such as the law

firms, courts, tribunals, prosecution department, legal advisory bodies, audit department and many others. To accurately ascertain the level of hands-on experience of the law in these departments it is cardinal that the law students when doing this attachment be given the role as some sort of “acting” legal personal in dealing with various purely legal and administrative matters at the workplace where they are being placed.

After finishing their law studies most of the law graduates would pour into the legally related careers or paths. Their ability to apply the law and speak fluently and confidently are inherent in meeting the expectations of legal positions. Other than these is to be able to come up with quick solutions to legal issues particularly important when attending a case before a court. Not less important is the ability to ensure clarity and honesty in affairs with his client. Effective communication contributes to success in advocacy. It is also pertinent to observe the ethics of the legal profession. From the simplest form to the most complex: from adhering to the court attire to more complex legal issues such as professional negligence, to name one. This further strengthens the need to have a strong, effective and professional clinical legal education in higher learning institutions. To simply rely on legal attachment in achieving the objective of producing quality lawyers is just a clear flaw in legal education.

Apart from giving the benefits to law students, clinical legal education also offers assistance to members of the community who are in need of justice but could not afford it. Though confidence might be an issue in the minds of prospective clients, law professors or legal educators are thus expected to ensure that law students are well equipped with the necessary “goods” before offering it to consumers. Therefore, clinical legal education is purely part and partial of the effective legal education alongside the Socratic method.

In the researcher’s view the formal establishment of a particular legal clinic is dependent upon indefinite factors. For instance, in the US the huge numbers of defendants created the necessity to seek assistance from law schools. Another reason might be to provide access to justice to underprivileged members of the community. One might also argue that a legal clinic is necessary in order to confer upon law students professional and effective advocacy to ensure justice is being administered. For example, where a law graduate works as a defence counsel and is stuttering in front of his client in court. This would reduce his credibility as a legal practitioner in the eyes of his client let alone the court.

This research aims at ascertaining the basic aspects of clinical legal education which includes definitions of clinical legal education, its benefits and challenges and last but not least a concluding remark of the research.

METHODOLOGY

This study is legal research by applying a content analysis technique to fulfil the objectives of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an article written by Priyashikha Rai and others, a number of aspects have been discussed. This includes the meaning and concept of clinical legal education, the evolution of clinical legal education, clinical legal education in India and its significance and the challenges to

clinical legal education. It is said by the authors of the article in elaborating on the meaning and concept of clinical legal education that clinical legal education is basically practicing law on a non-profit basis with an aim to serve the public interest or a group of people in the community who are not having means to legal justice. Apart from this, it is noted from the article that historical evolution of clinical education in some jurisdictions are also discussed such as in India, Australia and the United Kingdom. The authors also said that before there was any clinical legal education in Indian higher learning institutions legal education was “Law School” and not “Lawyer’s School”. As part of the significance in establishing clinical legal education in India it serves two purposes which is to teach law students legal practice hands-on and to assist members of the public who seek legal justice. One of the challenges currently facing the Indian legal higher learning institutions is the lack of legal educators to cater for the colossal amount of newcomers in legal studies.

In an article written by Hamzah, it is found that clinical legal education has been accepted by most higher learning institutions in Indonesia. It is also found that the ongoing clinical legal education in Indonesia is favorable to the nation. The author has also said that legal academicians and law students desire legal education which is free from any political and bureaucratic influences. It is also noted that the author has referred to one definition of clinical legal education as a process of learning which is done to equip law students with practical knowledge, skills to realize legal services and social justice done using interactive and reflective methods. One of the challenges faced by Indonesian law schools is the absence of a unified curriculum to teach all law subjects using the clinical legal education model.

In an article written by Jaspur Kaul and others, put emphasis on how teaching law students to think like a lawyer is crucial. This is done through clinical legal education. Apart from this, the authors discussed the proposed modules to be incorporated in the legal curriculum in order to cope with the need of delivering legal knowledge clinically to law students. The proposed modules are divided into two classes which are the legal skills and legal practice. Legal skills includes teaching several modules such as client counselling, legal writing, negotiation, legal drafting, advocacy, professional ethics and conducts. Whereas for legal practice modules such as advocacy, settlement agreements and advocacy (trial) are amongst the modules to be taught to law students.

In the paper authored by Sandbach and Johnson, examined among others the data and evidence which surround the increasing rate of pro bono legal activities in law schools in universities in the UK and Wales. In their paper, they said that legal aid clinics have been proven not only to be a place where law students acquire legal experience but on the other hand useful and beneficial for the general public as well: social justice for all. Since the introduction of the Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2013 there has been reduction in legal aid casework statistics especially cases pertaining to civil and family matters. It is interesting to note that the paper provides the outcomes of legal aid clinics activities which are legal outcomes, capability outcomes and wellbeing outcomes. Legal outcomes are such as resolved legal issues or at least legal advice tendered to clients was influential in decision-making of clients whether to take the case to court or otherwise. Capability outcome is for instance clients know what next step is to be taken in court. Wellbeing outcomes are such as reducing the level of stress in clients and making clients feel physically better.

In a paper authored by Vijendra Kumar, has discussed among others on the emergence of clinical legal education and clinical legal education during the pandemic of Covid-19. The author said that clinical legal education makes use of the human's cognitive and affective domains. The paper has also highlighted the emergence of clinical legal education in India. It is stated that clinical legal education is relatively recent in India. Today, all law schools must have legal clinics. The commencement of legal clinics in India is after the emergence of such clinics in the United States and other countries. Initially, law students have to complete certain procedural law subjects offered by the State Bar Council. After this, they have to undergo the one-year practical training. Upon finishing this, attachment must be done in the Chamber of Senior Advocates. Whilst during the time of the pandemic of Covid-19, clinical legal education was not addressed using technology.

In his article, du Plessis has explained on the inadequacy of the Socratic method in teaching and learning law modules. There are at least two methods which are commonly used in legal education which are the Socratic method and the experiential learning method. The former is an inexpensive professional education whereby the legal educator focuses on classroom lectures, refers students to textbooks to solve legal problems. This kind of method is argued to be having a destructive psychological effect on law students whilst instilling a sense of inferiority in law lecturers in terms of skills and abilities. Whereas the experiential learning method confers law students with an experience of having in hand the great responsibility of managing a client's legal interest. In this learning method, law students will acquire the ability of how a real practicing legal practitioner should behave and what decisions would be ethical to be made.

Irsyad and Divya in their article have elaborated among others on the inadequacy of the Socratic method in delivering ideal law curriculum to law students. This method involves among others asking critical questions to law students and guiding them in order to arrive at the solutions. The authors forwarded an idea that current legal education has to be in line with contemporary situation which is using technology in pedagogy. It has been proved from researches that legal resources are mostly gathered by law students through on the line means; digital. It is interesting to note that the article has highlighted on experiential learning method as an integration of theory and practice by combining academic inquiry with experience.

Suellyn Scarnecchia has written an interesting paper on clinical legal education in the US. One of the interesting points in her writing is that in order for universities in the US to gain accreditation from the American Bar Association is that they must offer clinical courses to law students. The clinical faculty members must be offered a secured position. It is stated that the role of clinical professors is to prepare law students and be available to attend court hearings, when needed. The author has also discussed that questions will often arise in the minds of law students when tendering their clinical contribution to the clients. This can make them reflect on how they perform. A crucial point expressed in her article is the need for more legal educators in order to facilitate the operation of legal clinics.

In Judith Dickson's article she has shared on among others the origins of clinical legal education in the US and Australia. Two major catalysts to the birth of clinical legal education in the United States is the case of *Gideon v Wainwright* 372 US 335 (1963) and the Ford Foundation. The decision of the court in the last-mentioned case had caused a serious

question as to how the large number of defendants are to be represented in court to defend them. Judges, practising attorneys and legal educators saw this a practical legal crisis and thus sought remedies from law schools to provide the required legal representations. The second catalyst is the role of Ford Foundation in which the Foundation has contributed funds to cater for legal assistance in the United States of America. For instance, six million dollars was credited to the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) in 1965 to expand the work of the National Council on Legal Clinics. Another funding was also provided by the Foundation to deliver clinical legal education to Americans on the objective of helping the poor for legal assistance.

In an article authored by James Marson some legal skills such as communication with clients and practicing ethical considerations and putting legal education to legal practice are still problems in the UK. This is due to several factors such as the lack of legal experts, funding, resources, time and accessibility. However, higher learning institutions in the UK continue to incorporate the clinical legal education in their pedagogical framework as this would put them at competition level.

In the article written by Margaret B. Drew & Andrew P. Morris, has among others discussed the challenges faced by clinical legal education. For example, since the priority of legal clinics is to teach legal skills the number of clients thus have to be limited to ensure efficient delivery. Other than this is the issue often costly to operate due to personal supervision of each law student.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Clinical legal education is basically a form of practice-oriented teaching and learning for legal curriculum. It is the application of the theoretical aspects of legal studies to 'real-life' working experience. This type of education is in various forms such as through legal mootings (James Marson et. al., 2005), client counselling and simply tendering legal advice to clients in need of legal aid. Clinical legal education is said to be the best example of experiential learning in law (Irsyad & Divya, 2020).

Students in a clinical legal education setting are among others exposed to the real emotions of clients, the skill in obtaining relevant facts from the clients, being honest to the client in giving advice despite of whether it would be popular to the client or otherwise and many other sorts of legal hands-on experience. Clinical legal education extends the learning capability of law students in that it blends the interpersonal, analytical and advocacy skills with their credibility, values and work habits forming a professional identity (Suellyn Scarnecchia, 1998).

According to research conducted on clinical legal education, this type of education started in the 1960s in the United States and in Australia in the 1970s due to the lack of legal services for the poor (Judith Dickson, 2000). Two major catalysts to the birth of clinical legal education in the United States is the case of *Gideon v Wainwright* 372 US 335 (1963) and the Ford Foundation. The decision of the court in the last-mentioned case had caused a serious question as to how the large number of defendants are to be represented in court to defend them. Judges, practising attorneys and legal educators saw this a practical legal crisis and thus

sought remedies from law schools to provide the required legal representations. The second catalyst is the role of Ford Foundation in which the Foundation has contributed funds to cater for legal assistance in the United States of America. For instance, six million dollars was credited to the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) in 1965 to expand the work of the National Council on Legal Clinics. Another funding was also provided by the Foundation to deliver clinical legal education to Americans on the objective of helping the poor for legal assistance.

Other jurisdictions such as in India have adopted the clinical approach in legal education after the introduction of such education in the United States of America (Vijendra Kumar, 2020). The reason is because it was found by regulating bodies of legal education in India that classroom curriculum is not sufficient to produce good lawyers (Priyashika Rai, 2021).

Definition of Clinical Legal Education (CLE)

There are various definitions provided by researchers in Clinical Legal Education (CLE). One of the definitions of it is that it is the study of law through real or simulated casework which enables the students to experience the law in motion and after that reflects on the experiences they gained therefrom. (Sadhu Singh et. al, 2019).

Another definition according to another research is a process of learning with the intention of providing law with the intention of providing law students with practical knowledge, skills, values in order to realize legal services and social justice, implemented using interactive and reflective methods. (Hamzah, 2018).

Other than the above a definition is provided in another study which defines Clinical Legal Education (CLE) as a non-profit law practice usually utilized to serve the public or a group of people in the society who are underprivileged or lacking of access to the legal system. (Priyashikha Rai, 2021).

According to Professor G. Amsterdam clinical legal education is a technique used to teach students how to learn systematically by engaging in experience which simultaneously educates them in a broader range of legal analyses and legal skills rather than just mere theories learnt in Law Schools. (Vijendra Kumar, 2020).

According to Irsyad and Divya in their research on clinical legal education they said that it refers to a pedagogy which places students in a real legal environment or situations such as a lawyer, counsellor, mediator, public policy drafter: it is a role-based education. (Irsyad & Divya, 2020).

The Difference Between Socratic Method and Experiential Learning Method

There are at least two methods which are commonly used in legal education which are the Socratic method and the experiential learning method. The former is an inexpensive professional education whereby the legal educator focuses on classroom lectures, refers students to textbooks to solve legal problems. This kind of method is argued to be having a destructive psychological effect on law students whilst instilling a sense of inferiority in law lecturers in terms of skills and abilities (du Plessis, 2021). Whereas the experiential learning

method confers law students with an experience of having in hand the great responsibility of managing a client's legal interest. In this learning method, law students will acquire the ability of how a real practicing legal practitioner should behave and what decisions would be ethical to be made.

Aims or Objectives of Clinical Legal Education (CLE)

Based on past research there are tons of aims or objectives of clinical legal education (CLE). For the purpose of this paper, the researcher has collectively summarized all the aims or objectives as follows.

The first objective is to teach students broader legal skills in analysis. In learning the law through clinical legal education the students are exposed not only to the theoretical aspect of the study but also the practical one whereby the laws they have learnt in lectures are applied. The skills of the students will thus increase and widen as they will have more hands-on experience with the laws. In giving legal advice for example, the student will have to relate a legal principle with a legal issue which the client is requiring legal assistance. New cases come to hand will enrich the students' application skills of the laws.

The second objective is to teach students how to be interactive with the people. Clinical legal education equips students with interactive skills as they have to communicate with the clients. They will acquire knowledge and skills in order to make the client counselling session more of a two-way rather than merely one party's advice to another. To achieve this the students will thus learn and acquire some skills for instance in asking questions to extract the legal issue from the client in the mode where it is comfortable for the latter.

The third objective is to teach students how to effectively and confidently represent the clients in real life situations. Numerous and various experiences in handling different types of clients and in different legal issues in court will therefore improve the students effectiveness and confidence to become a real lawyer later in real-life situations. It is thus pertinent that the clinic legal education offered to the students has vast coverage of laws.

The fourth objective is to provide the demands needed in order to sufficiently cater for legal cases. In some countries, students of law are even summoned to assist in the handling of real-life cases in court proceedings due to shortage of legal officers such as in *Gideon v Wainwright* 372 US 335 (1963) and in *Argersinger v Hamlin* 407 US 25 (1972).

Last but not least is to train the students to become more honest in delivering justice/helping the court in achieving justice by making themselves open for more pro-bono cases when they practice. In real-life practice of a lawyer the case which comes for assistance would require some fees though the lawyer may sometimes handle the case free of charge as a form of contribution to the community service or pro-bono. In clinical legal education pro-bono cases are encouraged so that the students will appreciate justice more from the time of study and even when they enter into the workforce of legal practice.

Benefits of Clinical Legal Education (CLE)

The first benefit is that legal clinics give law students learning and hands-on experience in order to be industry-ready (James Marson et. al., 2005). This is because these clinics allow students to be in the real legal environment face to face with the client. This will instill professional value and a more sense of sensitivity towards justice. Law students will thus be trained to deliver justice more critically, effectively, professionally and promptly at a particular occasion.

The second benefit is that legal clinics give law students motivation and increase their desires in participating in the legal workforce (James Marson et. al., 2005). This is particularly so in commercial law cases as it is a very challenging aspect of the law. The availability of legal clinics renders pure satisfaction in the hearts of the law students as they do not feel that they are being ‘used’ or ‘used as a cheap labour’ when they are doing their attachment at law firms.

The third benefit of clinical legal education is that it gives law students an evaluation of their career path (James Marson et. al., 2005). In this regard, it means that the visions of law students could be broadened and changed depending on each and every student’s personal evaluation. For instance, some students would think that pursuing a career in the legal profession such as becoming a lawyer is his dream. Whereas some others might find that other legal career paths suit them better such as becoming academicians etc.

The fourth benefit of clinical legal education is that it develops not only practical skills of law students but also the legal ethics which need to be adhered to when practicing after graduating (du Plessis, 2021). Practicing law in the real working environment necessitates not only the law graduates ability in comprehending the legal issue and to practically solve those issues in court or in giving settlements but to strictly observe legal ethics. A legal practitioner is a honourable profession in a society or community and thus ethics of the legal profession must never be crossed.

The fifth benefit of clinical legal education is that it does not assist in giving legal advice to the clients but also helping the clients in deciding the next step to be taken (Sandbach & Johnson, 2019). Among others, clinical legal education is giving impact in at least three areas of client-oriented benefits which are legal outcomes, capability outcomes and wellbeing outcomes. Legal outcomes such as resolved legal issues or at least legal advice tendered to clients was influential in decision-making of clients whether to take the case to court or otherwise. Capability outcome is for instance clients know what next step is to be taken in court. Wellbeing outcomes are such as reducing the level of stress in clients and making clients feel physically better.

Challenges of Clinical Legal Education (CLE)

The first challenge is that since the priority of legal clinics is to teach legal skills the number of clients thus have to be limited to ensure efficient delivery (Margaret B. Drew 2013). A simple example is where a small number of clinical educators are available whereas an escalating amount of law students enroll. It would thus follow that the educators have to ensure that the focus of the clinic is to teach the students and not the statistical number of

clients coming to the clinics or who could use the assistance offered by the clinic. Therefore, clients received by a legal aid clinic have to be restricted to a particular amount to ensure efficient delivery by the educators to the students and from the students to the clients.

The second challenge is that legal clinics are often costly to operate due to personal supervision of each law student (Margaret B. Drew 2013). Legal clinics use the method of supervision on a per student basis. The workload is therefore far much more heavy if compared to teaching a number of students in a normal classroom. For instance, less attention needs to be paid to each student in a normal classroom. This is evident in circumstances where a student is directly representing a client. Therefore, clinical programs must keep a low ratio of legal educators to students (Suellyn Scanecchia, 1998).

The third challenge is that legal educators in legal clinics have to focus on one area or topic sufficiently before moving on to the next one (Margaret B. Drew 2013). This would undermine other areas of law which have yet to be taught by the legal educators and to be experienced by the law students. Eventually, the professional growth of law students will be affected.

The fourth challenge is that although higher educational institutions nowadays have incorporated legal clinics, researchers have highlighted its limitation in whether the practical skills acquired from such clinics are actually put into practice or beneficial when law graduates enter the workforce. (James Marson et. al., 2005).

The fifth challenge is that although legal clinics provide benefits to clients who are in need of legal aid or services, some clients naturally desire their legal advisors to be having high competency in delivering advice to them (James Marson et. al., 2005). Rationally, a person would believe more that what is being said is a legal practitioner than a student of law when it comes to the giving of advice in matters affecting their personal rights.

CONCLUSION

Clinical legal education provides the practical tool to put legal theories learnt by law students in classrooms into action. It offers various benefits in the effective pedagogy of legal educators on their students. It has been claimed that having legal clinics in higher learning institutions is paramount due to certain reasons. Some higher learning institutions in several countries might need clinical legal education due to lack of legal practitioners such as defence counsels to represent the criminal clients. Some others might need it to assist the underprivileged members of their nation in getting access to justice. All in all, a proper, systematic and adequate legal clinic is cardinal in order to produce effective, ethical, honest and highly professional law graduates.

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