

## CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: ASSESSING THE IMPACT ON LAW STUDENTS IN A LAW CLINIC IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

One of the core missions of clinical legal education is to expose students to the legal needs of society while enhancing access to justice for indigent members of the community. This, the University of Ibadan Women's Law Clinic (UI-WLC) does by offering pro bono legal aid to indigent women in the community who lack access to justice. In the process, law students are engaged in clinic experiences involving interaction with real clients and conduct of outreach programs for different target audiences within the community. Through these experiences, it is expected that professionalism, empathy, equality and a sense of fairness is inculcated in the students. Students trained with these values ideally have a strong sense of what is just and fair and are able to choose careers and lifestyles that support their immediate communities. Since its establishment, the UI-WLC has groomed over 960 law students; and currently has about 120 students spread over third, fourth and fifth year students, however, an assessment of the impact of social justice values which the clinic seeks to impart to the students through the training they receive at the clinic has not been carried out. This research seeks to achieve this aim through a mixed methods approach. Using a quota sampling method, 90 law graduates were identified and

interviewed through self-administered pre-tested questionnaires and in-depth interview guides. Two sessions of focus group discussions were also conducted. Findings in this study revealed how participation in the UI-WLC through various activities and programs has had both positive and negative outcomes for the students. It also showed an aspect of group dynamics which has to be improved upon at the UI-WLC to better equip students to impact the society.

**Keywords:** Social Justice, Women's Law Clinic, Clinical Legal Education

## Introduction

Clinical Legal Education is a progressive educational system that is mostly implemented through university-based law faculty programmes to develop better trained and more socially conscious ethical lawyers.<sup>1</sup> It is recognised as a method of teaching law, ethics and professional development<sup>2</sup> and it also implies a method of teaching that has a social justice dimension in most cases.<sup>3</sup> It includes community education projects, such as community lawyering, in-house live client clinics, skills training courses, etc.<sup>4</sup> Clinical legal education has been established and employed in

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<sup>1</sup>Lasky B, and Nazeri N. The Development and Expansion of University-based Community/Clinical Legal Education Programs in Malaysia: Means, Methods, Strategies. *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* p3.

<sup>2</sup> Gibson F. Community Engagement in Action: Creating Successful University Clinical Legal Internship. (2012) *African Journal of Clinical Legal Education and Access to Justice*. Vol 1: 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> Barry M., Dubin J. and Peter J. Clinical Education for this Millennium: The Third Wave, (2000) *Clinical Law Review*. Vol 7: 1, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Maisel P. Expanding and Sustaining Clinical Legal Education in Developing Countries: What We can Learn from South Africa (2006) *Fordham International Law Journal* Vol 30(2) 374-420.

teaching law, ethics, social justice and professional development in Nigeria by the Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI) and at present, there are established law clinics in many university campuses in Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Clinical legal education provides law students with life experiences, in order to develop local legal capacity, and help protect human rights in their respective communities.<sup>6</sup> Many of the clinical programs imbibe social justice objectives as a goal through a process whereby students learn by doing and involve themselves with real client or personal interaction. This exposes students to the actions and inner workings of communities and in doing so, gives students, insight into issues affecting marginalized and vulnerable groups of people.

Clinical Legal Education could involve the use of any kind of practical or active training for legal professionals to impart skills such as the ability to solve legal problems using various dispute resolution mechanisms, providing legal representation, recognition and resolution of ethical dilemmas, and promoting justice and fairness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Oludayo John 'Clinical Legal Education in Nigeria: Envisioning the future ' (2021) Australian Journal of Clinical Legal Education 10(1) 2-15.

<sup>6</sup>Open Justice Initiative. Legal Clinics: Serving People, Improving Justice available at <http://www/justiceinitiative.org> accessed August 14, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, R.J. 1996. Clinical Legal Education as a means to improve access to justice in Developing and Newly Democratic Countries (A paper presented at the Human rights Seminar of the Human Rights Institute International Bar Association, Berlin.

The University of Ibadan Women's Law Clinic (UI-WLC) is located in the Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan. The Clinic focuses on ensuring access to justice for indigent women who cannot afford legal services. The Clinic was established at a time it was greatly needed and prior to its establishment, there was no formal training on social justice and clients counselling for law students in Nigeria. Once this gap became obvious, NULAI proposed an idea to establish law clinics that would benefit of law students in this regard. The rationale behind establishment of Law Clinics was to train students on necessary developmental skills an aspiring lawyer should have. Hence, it is important that students pass through a law clinic so that they are exposed to experiential learning, where students represent actual clients as well as classroom-based pedagogy.

The UI-WLC is a laboratory of learning for students who undergo clinical trainings to enhance their learning process. The students while gaining knowledge through community outreaches are exposed to the problems faced by these groups. They also learn about professional responsibility and develop personal commitment to sustaining the rule of law. Through participation at the clinic, they gain empathy towards solving human right issues and social justice ideas. Therefore, clinical legal education is essential as it enables the students to gain the needed required skills to become ethically conscious lawyers. This article examines the impact which the clinical legal education mode of learning adopted at the UI-WLC has had on law students.

## **Clinical Legal Education in the University of Ibadan Women's Law Clinic**

The Women's Law Clinic is a specialized clinic for women and general issues relating to women. It was established on July 18, 2007, and it has been operating since then. It is a clinic at the Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan and one of its aims is to ensure that women get access to justice. The Clinic renders such services in the University of Ibadan community and the general populace of Ibadan environs. The clinic does not resort to court for matters that come before it but rather, encourages alternative dispute resolution methods that remedies wrongs between parties but at the same time, maintains the integrity and harmony of the parties.<sup>8</sup>

The objectives of the Clinic are to provide pro bono legal services to women who cannot afford legal services in Ibadan; to train law students whilst utilizing the techniques of clinical legal education; to research and document the basic problems on women's access to justice and in addition, to carry out intervention programmes to facilitate women's access to justice. In order to ensure that the goals of the Clinic and also the techniques of clinical legal education are carried out, students participate actively in the Women's Law Clinic under the supervision of staff clinicians/supervisors. Students also embark on community lawyering and street law activities, to identify with community members on their fundamental human rights.

The Clinic conducts community outreaches to create awareness and to make legal

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<sup>8</sup> Byron I.P. The relationship between social justice and clinical legal education: A case study of the Women's Law Clinic, Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan, Nigeria (2014) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* Vol. 20(2):563- 571.

rights available to those who might need legal assistance on issues pertaining to law. To ensure that community members understand what the Clinic portrays, students have role plays, playlets, short drama presentations and jingles in communities or places where indigent women are in their majority.

The Clinic focuses on the use of interactive teaching methodology, development of practice and practical skills such as counselling, interviewing, negotiating and oral advocacy whilst at the same time, placing emphasis on the ethical dimensions of legal practice.<sup>9</sup> The Clinic organizes seminars and workshops for students and trains them on the ethical aspects of working as a volunteer in the Women's Law Clinic. What the Women's Law Clinic tries to imbibe is to ensure that students look at issues from diverse points of view thus giving them a deeper understanding of how the law works and how it ought to be.

### **Research Problem**

The UI-WLC has been in existence for more than ten years and has groomed a number of students. These students upon graduation settle in different areas of practice both within and outside the country. The association of students with the Clinic is expected to instill into them the skills required to advance the course of justice in the society. Since its establishment in particular, the UI-WLC has groomed over 960 law students;

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<sup>9</sup> Bangbose O. and Olomola O. Clinical Legal Education and Cultural Relativism- The Realities in the 21st Century (2014) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education. Vol. 20(2) 584

and currently has about 120 students spread over third, fourth and fifth year students, however, an assessment of the impact of social justice values which the clinic seeks to impart to the students through the training they receive at the clinic has not been carried out. It is imperative to note that the context within which a pro bono legal clinic operates changes alongside changing societal needs. One of such changing societal needs was occasioned by the COVID -19 pandemic. The pandemic was a global one and its attendant effects were felt all over the world, Nigeria was not left out as the impact of the pandemic was felt on all aspects of her economy as the pandemic brought about the deepest recession in the country since the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> One of the core objectives of clinical legal education at this time is to involve law students in legal aid activities that can make them more responsive and attuned to societal needs. In particular, the socio-economic status of the average Nigerian reduced considerably after the pandemic given the high rates of inflation and economic downturn. An average Nigerian who is hardly able to feed his or her family cannot have access to justice as a result of his status. Law students who have been imbibed with social justice values due to their exposure to activities at UI-WLC can play an important role in filling this lacuna. A study of this nature is necessary at this time to assess whether the values imparted on the students during their years of legal training has inculcated

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<sup>10</sup> Lain J. and Vishwanath T. 2021. The COVID-19 crisis in Nigeria: What's happening to welfare? New data calls for expanded social protection in Africa's most populous country available at <http://www.blogworldbank.org> accessed on June 7, 2023.

in students the requisite social justice skills needed for building resilience and developing strong connections in the aftermath of the pandemic.

### **Research questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the components of clinical legal education and what understanding do law student clinicians have of the various components of clinical legal education?
2. What are the components of social justice education and what understanding do law students clinicians have of the components of social justice education?
3. How has participation as student clinicians at the UI-WLC instilled social justice education values into the students?

### **Materials and Methods**

This research adopted a mixed methods approach to elicit opinion of law students on the impact and relevance of clinical legal education and social justice on their training at the University of Ibadan. A total number of 90 students participated in the study. This study sample comprised students in their 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years of study. The mixed



method approach utilised comprised the use of questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The questionnaires were administered on the students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study. The focus group discussion was conducted with students in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of study and in-depth interviews were held mainly with the students in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of study. Justification for the mixed approach used is to attempt as much as possible to document the experiences of the students in details and to triangulate their responses. Thus, information obtained from students in a particular class was compared with that obtained from another class of students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The utilitarian theory lends support to the assessment carried out in this study. While social justice values seek to ensure a fair and equitable society through a fair distribution of resources and opportunities to disadvantaged groups, the utilitarian theory advocates for actions that bring greatest benefits to the greatest number of people.<sup>11</sup> From the origins of the utilitarian theory, equality and impartiality was encouraged and this was achieved by giving more attention to the welfare of those in the upper echelons of society and paying less attention to the needs of those in the lower strata. Utilitarianism is one of the most significant methodologies to normative ethics in the account of philosophy. It is founded on the indication that the moral value

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<sup>11</sup> Freeman, M.D. 1996. *Lloyd's introduction to jurisprudence*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Sweet and Maxwell, London.

of a deed is simply known through what it impacts on general value in making the most of happiness or pleasure as seen in the populace.<sup>12</sup>

By this theory, the option that gives the highest pleasure or good deeds is selected as the option which has the best value. In other words, the utility of an act is defined by the degree to which it generates greatest happiness principle. The principle pays more consideration to the differing outcome of pursued actions. In so doing, it approves of the pursued actions that have the best results.<sup>13</sup> When applied to the present study, the need to conduct the assessment of the impact of social justice values from involvement with clinical legal education will invariably result in better outcome for the greater majority in the study site. For example, the findings of the study would show areas where better efforts need to be placed to better equip law students for social justice. This would invariably extend to other sectors where the students are relevant.

### **Study sample and sampling size**

A total number of 90 students participated in the study. Seventy 3<sup>rd</sup> year students were administered questionnaires, two sets of focus group discussions were conducted on

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<sup>12</sup> Maultinus, T. Ed. An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation by Jeremy Bentham. The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy. Retrieved 21 April 2023 from [www.utilitarianism.com](http://www.utilitarianism.com).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

students in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of study, and in-depth interviews were held with 10 students in the final year class.

### **Research instruments**

The research instruments used in this study include questionnaires, in-depth interview guides and focus group discussion guides. These research instruments were developed after extensive review of literature on the subject of research. The instruments were pre-tested among 20 randomly selected students and feedback obtained was used to further fine tune the research instruments. The questionnaires and interview guides were developed based on the components of social justice education as propounded by Heather W. Hackman. These components include Content mastery, Critical thinking, Group multi-cultural dynamics, Personal reflection and Action for social change.

### **Ethical considerations**

All ethical considerations were observed in the course of this research. This included obtaining informed consent from the students. The nature of the research was carefully explained to the students in clear terms and consent was given after they understood what the research required of them. No name was required for the students who completed the questionnaires, and they were also told that they could

withdraw from the study whenever they wished too. Anonymity of the responses on the questionnaire was ensured by giving each questionnaire an identifiable code number.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion criteria**

The students who participated in this study were selected based on their level of study and length of work as a student volunteer at the UI-WLC, thus, an important criteria for inclusion in the study was that the student must have been actively involved in the clinic activities and various outreach programs. Students who were in the first and second years of study were excluded. In addition to this, students who were not actively involved in the clinic activities and outreach programs were excluded from the study.

### **Clinical Legal Education and Access to Justice**

One of the core foundation values of the UI-WLC is access to justice. Access to justice refers to procedural and substantive mechanisms which exist to ensure that citizens have the opportunity of seeking redress for the violation of their fundamental human rights within the legal system.<sup>14</sup> It is fundamental to a fair and inclusive society where

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<sup>14</sup> Access to Justice and Human Rights Protection in Nigeria- Sur. <https://sur.connectas.org>access-justice.../> accessed 12 July, 2023.

inequality is addressed because there is inadequate protection of human rights, poor or lack of access to legal services and other inequities in the legal system that have far-reaching consequences for people who are in crisis. People come into contact with the legal system for many reasons, such as domestic violence, family breakdown, debt or mortgage stress, tenancy or employment disputes, and crime. Hence, access to justice includes the rights to fair hearing, access to legal representation in order to protect human rights generally.<sup>15</sup> Clinical legal education therefore gives students a foundation of professionalism and dedication to public service that they carry throughout their careers. The law students experience first-hand the rewards of working for the public interest, which helps to foster the development of a more socially responsible legal profession.<sup>16</sup> The students, whilst in the clinic, get a first-hand experience of how the law works and it inculcates in them the idea that disputes can be resolved fairly and peacefully by using the law.<sup>17</sup>

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

This segment of the article discusses findings from the interviews conducted on the students. The findings are presented based on the components of Hackman's social

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Open Justice Initiative, *op.cit*, at p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., at p. 8.

justice education. An aspect of the research findings also focuses on the perception of students on the impact of clinical legal education.

### **Hackman's social justice education**

Heather Hackman<sup>18</sup> proposed a means of teaching social justice from a perspective that meets the commitment to empowering education. This approach utilises a pedagogical lens to affirm social justice values. The tools identified by Hackman include tools for content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection and an awareness of group multicultural dynamics. Central to these first four tools is the last tool which involves understanding group dynamics of the law clinic and the socially constructed identities of the staff clinicians and students. These tools are more particularly discussed in the sections below.

#### **a. Content mastery**

Hackman in his work aptly described the ends to which social justice education serves by identifying the indicators or ends results that can be used as parameters to evaluate how social justice has been met. These indicators were used in this present study and the interview questions were crafted along these indicators which include tools for

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<sup>18</sup> Hackman H. Five essential components for social justice education [2005] *Equity and Excellence in Education* 38 103-109.

content mastery, tools for critical thinking, tools for social action and change, tools for personal reflection and tools for awareness of multicultural dynamics. Possession of skills in line with these parameters would no doubt equip a law student with requisite knowledge of how to build resilience. Content mastery is a vital aspect of social justice education, and it consists of three principal domains: factual information, historical contextualization, and a macro to-micro content analysis. Content mastery being the first component of effective social justice education proposes information acquisition as an essential basis for learning. Without complex sources of information, students cannot possibly participate in positive, proactive social change.<sup>19</sup>

#### **b. Tools for critical thinking**

Another parameter propounded by Hackman is critical thinking. Critical thinking prepares students to become active agents of change and social justice in their communities. Critical thinking builds on information as part of content mastery. Hackman stated further that mere possession of information alone is not sufficient to empower students for social change. He likened this to the issue of racism in the United States wherein individuals have factual information about racism, nevertheless the knowledge possessed has not translated into social change against

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid at p 104.

racism. In other words, there is a link that connects action for social change with information possessed by students. The link described here is critical thinking.

### **c. Tools for personal reflection**

The third aspect in Hackman's component of social justice education is personal reflection. Personal reflection describes a process of self-assessment and self-reflection which necessitates students reviewing their work and reflecting on their learning progress. It involves taking an in-depth look at one's action and decisions and recognising how they have affected oneself and his immediate environment.<sup>20</sup>

### **d. Action for social change**

The fourth component in Hackman's social justice in education is action for social change. While social change refers to the way human interactions, relations, behaviour patterns and cultural norms change over time, action for social change are the inspired steps taken by individuals or groups to influence these human interactions and behaviour patterns. According to Hackman, tools for action and social change are critical in that they enable students move from cynicism and despair to hope and possibility.

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<sup>20</sup> Anna Belobony 'Theories on self-reflection in Education' being text of conference proceedings of Asian Conference on Education available at <http://www.researchgate.net> on 2 December 2022.



### **e. Group multicultural dynamics**

The fifth and last component of Hackman's social justice education values is group multicultural dynamics. This involves a proper understanding of the cultural interplay between the teachers and students and in this present study, the staff clinicians, students and the clients who come to the WLC. An understanding of group multicultural dynamics is essential to the growth of the WLC as the staff and student clinicians emanate from diverse cultural backgrounds. Group work or group assignments such as community outreaches can succeed where intercultural awareness helps group members determine what takes priority in the clinic, be it group decisions on matters of interest in the clinic or the individual interests.

### **Socio-demographic characteristics of participants**

Out of the seventy students that filled the questionnaire, twenty-one were male (30%) and forty-nine (70%) were females. All the students were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty years. Only 4 out of the seventy students were married representing 5.71%. Seven students were Igbos from the south-eastern part of Nigeria and the remaining (63) were Yorubas from the south-western part of Nigeria. The respondents were asked general questions to test their basic understanding of what clinical legal education, social justice, access to justice is and they were also asked questions on the association between their experiences and these concepts. Findings

from the questionnaires were corroborated with the information obtained from the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions.

**On the understanding of the components of Clinical Legal Education and its impact on the students.**

The first research question was to document the understanding of law student clinicians of the various components of clinical legal education and how this has impacted on them. The skills which can be imparted via clinical legal education were identified thus: ethics and professional responsibility skills, legal research skills, law office management skills, client interviewing skills, counselling and witness interviewing skills and mediation and conciliation skills.

Out of the 70 students who participated in this research, 63 stated that their work at the clinic gave them more insights about ethics and professional responsibility as well as law office management skills. 56 students stated that they obtained mediation and conciliation skills and legal writing skills respectively. On the other hand, 70 students affirmed that they got legal research skills from their experiences at the clinic. This is presented in the Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Pie chart showing skills acquired by law students in the UI-WLC

The central goal of clinical legal education has been to provide professional education in the interest of justice and its objective has been to teach students to employ legal knowledge, legal theory, legal skills to meet social and individual needs. To ensure that social justice impacts students, there exists a professional obligation to perform public service to the community to ensure access to justice.<sup>21</sup> The student's feeling of personal responsibility in representing a client can grow into a feeling of social responsibility for the provision of legal services to the poor.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the consciousness of the student is raised because the student would have realised that if not for the clinic, the client would not have access to legal assistance.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Duncan, K. 1970. How the Law School Fails: A Polemic, 1 Yale Rev. I. & Soc. Action 71, 80. See also Byron I.P. op cit 555.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Wizner. 2001. Beyond Skills Training. Faculty Scholarship Series. Paper 1844 available at [https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss\\_papers/1844](https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/1844) accessed 12 December, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

It has often been stated that the objectives of a law clinic would to a great extent determine the output of the organisation. Hyams<sup>24</sup> thus opined that clinics in their mission ought to have a wider view other than mere integration of practical legal skills with knowledge of the law. To Hyams, other additional requirements which a law clinic can include in its mandate include- professional autonomy, professional judgement and commitment to lifelong learning. These, he believed ought to be included in the objectives of a law clinic. One of the mission statements of the UI-WLC is to provide a practical laboratory where law students are trained to put into practice their theoretical knowledge. The responses obtained from the students showed that classroom experiences of the students were mostly reaffirmed as the students narrated their experiences in the clinic. In line with this Arimoro<sup>25</sup> had identified the need to aid students' participation in law clinic activities to imbibe the right skills and prepare them for the rigours of legal practice. He identified interviewing skills, document and motion drafting skills as one of the more important skills to be imbibed. In the Law faculty, the students are trained using simulations as the most widely used mode of teaching. The responses from the students in this study showed that clinic experiences affirmed the simulations from classroom teaching. In the words of one of the students

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<sup>24</sup> Hyams, R. 'On teaching students to act like a lawyer: What sort of a lawyer?' [2008] *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 13.21-32.

<sup>25</sup> Arimoro, A. 'Clinical Legal Education: Vision and Strategy for start-up clinics in Nigeria' [2019] *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* (26)(1) 132-157 available at [papers.ssrn.com](http://papers.ssrn.com) accessed 20 September 2023.

‘Our Family law teacher during my third year of study had once given us a scenario in the class and we were asked to state how we would handle the client... it was a matter bothering on domestic violence, child maintenance and separation leading to divorce. There were a number of things I didn’t understand way back then about how to interview and counsel a client who was violent and confused, I initially felt that the best way to handle such clients was through the use of commensurate force and aggression. I only realised what the Lecturer tried to tell us back then when I witnessed a real-life situation similar to the one mentioned in class at the Law Clinic. Now I know better.’

*(Female/500level/24years)*

### **Importance and impact of Social Justice**

Social justice through access to justice is aimed at educating the neglected members of a community while addressing their legal problems. Social justice is used by clinical law teachers to teach students on how to educate clients on their rights. Social justice is however important not only for its effect upon clients but also because of its effect upon students that pass through the law clinic.<sup>26</sup> As earlier stated, Hackman’s components of social justice education served as a guide to determining the impact of

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<sup>26</sup> Guggenheim, M. ‘Fee Generating Clinics: Can We Bear the Costs?’ [1995] 1 Clinical. Law Review 677, 683.

social justice on the students. The findings here are presented based on each component.

### **On tools for content mastery and its impact on the students**

Content mastery depicts instances where learners can demonstrate the mastery of key aspects of a learned content. Content mastery skills are important because they help to reinforce classroom learning. While in the classroom, law students are taught the theoretical aspects of law, which is meant to be reinforced by the practical aspects from engagements with live clients at the UI-WLC.

To this end, students were asked questions relating to how what they have been taught in the classroom was reinforced by what they experienced while at the clinic.

All the students agreed that volunteer work at the clinic enhanced the theoretical aspects of their learning.<sup>27</sup> Most of the students affirmed that they were able to see more about how human rights was enforced by the practical aspects at the law clinic.

A particular student stated as follows:

'I saw aspects of reproductive health rights... sexual autonomy... sexual rights

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<sup>27</sup> Christen A. Sendur 'Historical contextualization in student's writing' *Journal of the Learning Sciences* [2021] 30: 4-5.

and more of what I was taught in my second year of study being played out when women with sexual and domestic violence cases came to the clinic and I had the opportunity of being in session with them.'

*(Female/400 level student/21years)*

Another student recounted his experience thus:

'An interview had been scheduled with a client and I was meant to be there, I knew I just had to do more personal research on the subject matter, the clients did see us as knowledgeable and not just ordinary students, thus I just knew I had to meet up with expectation'.

*(Male/500level student/23years)*

A student recounted that during clinic outreach programmes, she discovered that lecturers were willing and open to share information with the students beyond what they offered during classroom teaching. This implies that information in classroom teaching is regulated and somewhat apportioned whilst learning beyond classroom environment is likely to be more flexible and robust. In a study carried out by Nguigi and Thinguri,<sup>28</sup> it was discovered that whenever a student is able to interpret and apply the subject matter knowledge learnt in a classroom, it makes a huge impact on

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<sup>28</sup> Lydiah N. Kamamia Nelly T. Ngugi and Ruth W. Thinguri 'To establish the extent to which the subject mastery enhances quality teaching to students' teachers during teaching practice' [2014] International Journal of Education and Research 2: 7.

the student and they are enabled to make a contribution to positively change their environment. For another student, her experience was entirely different as she narrated that she saw a scenario during one of her clinic sessions, and while still reflecting on this experience, she encountered the same scenario in her community. It was not difficult for her to know what to do at this instance because she addressed the issue based on how the situation was addressed at the Clinic.

### **On tools for critical thinking and its impact on the students**

Based on this, the students in this study were asked questions on how participation at the clinic through live sessions and community outreaches enabled them to employ critical thinking.

A student narrated thus

'Recently, I was on a social media platform, and I read a tweet about a case of domestic violence...consciously and unconsciously, I was spurred to inquire more about the situation... a few years back prior to being a clinician, I wouldn't have done that. Another student spoke about how she was able to through critical thinking connects classroom ideas with solving and responding to societal needs. In his words, I was able to come up with engaging ways and innovative ways such as the use of an online game to teach sex education to a teenage group, before I could do this, I had to understand the



reasons for teenage pregnancy and early commencement of sexual activities by teenagers in that community. Knowledge of this goes beyond classroom teaching experiences’.

While the UI-WLC has relied extensively on Clinic participation to foster students with tools for critical thinking, another approach to this was utilized in a Malaysian University Law Clinic where it was observed that the hitherto trend of learning via didactic methods was no longer effective as learning process shifted from teacher centered to students focused learning.<sup>29</sup> Mudd’s<sup>30</sup> reference to Dressel and Mayhem identified critical thinking tools by reference to the following abilities:

1. Ability to define a problem
2. Ability to select pertinent information for a solution to the problem
3. Ability to recognise stated and unstated assumptions
4. Ability to formulate and select relevant and promising hypotheses
5. Ability to draw conclusions validly and to judge the validity of the inferences<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jaspal kaur Sadhi Singh, Vilmah Balakrishnam and Darmain Segaran ‘Thinking like a lawyer: How clinical legal education transformed the law undergraduate’ [2019] (18)(2) HSLJ, 7.

<sup>30</sup> John O. Mudd ‘Thinking critically about ‘thinking like a lawyer’ [1983] (33)(4) Journal of Legal Education, 704-705.

<sup>31</sup> P.L. Dressel and L.B. Mayhew ‘General Education: Exploration in Evaluation (American Council on Education) [1954] 179-180.

Findings from this study showed that students were able to define problems from what clients presented at the clinic, they were also able to select the required information to solve the problem from the theoretical learning they received from classroom teaching. However, it is doubtful whether they were able to proffer solutions or draw conclusions based on formulating and selecting relevant hypotheses and judging the validity of the inferences.

### **On tools for personal reflection and its impact on the students**

Various responses were given by the students when questions relating to personal reflection were asked. About fifty percent of the students affirmed that participation at the clinic enhanced personal reflection for them whilst the remaining fifty percent said that they had no reflection on their personal life. Amongst the students who admitted that participation at the clinic enabled personal reflection, a particular student said

'I have had the opportunity to reflect on understanding Gender based violence as it occurs in my community, this has made me to realise that there is a need to sensitize people within my environment against that. In addition, through personal reflection, I have come to understand that the lack of understanding about the rights to respect people's bodily integrity has promoted the high incidence of rape.... if so, the onus is on me as a law student to inform and educate my immediate community about the existence of these rights.'

Amongst the students who stated that there was no association between participation at the clinic and personal reflection, one of the students gave reasons for this, he stated that 'all that I do at the clinic and faculty is to enable me fulfill requirements for my graduation and nothing more. I do not allow the issues emanating from the clinic affect my personal life in anyway'. Another student when asked about her experience and personal reflection expressed fear, in her words, what I have seen in reality is enormous and beyond me '.... I wonder if I will be able to do anything related to what I have studied here.' In the view of the authors of this article, for this particular student to have arrived at this conclusion, she must have engaged personal reflection however little.

David Kolb<sup>32</sup> in 2014 conceived the idea of experience being the source of learning development. He thereafter produced a cyclical model for reflective practice which was adapted by Gibbs in a six-step 'reflective cycle'.<sup>33</sup> This reflective cycle sets out, in summary, that when reflecting on an interaction with clients, students' needs to think round: describing what happened – what were they thinking and feeling – what was good or bad about the experience – what sense they can make of the situation – what else could be done – if it arose again what would they do? This reflective cycle as

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<sup>32</sup> David Kolb 'Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development' (2014) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Jersey: Pearson Education).

<sup>33</sup> Gibbs G 'Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods' (1988) (Oxford: Further Education Unit).

explained above aptly sums up the entire process of personal reflection and the consequence it has on the students.

Casey<sup>34</sup> likened the application of personal reflection to the professional field wherein legal practitioners have to be able to exercise judgement in a quick and efficient manner. This enables the law professional to distinguish or sift out relevant information from the irrelevant ones and to assess the risks associated with different courses of action. The various experiences as narrated by law students at the UI-WLC has in a way enabled the students to sift out relevant information when confronted with similar issues they had faced while at the clinic. A fifth-year student narrated thus:

‘A student in my hall of residence approached me and said she had been robbed of her possessions on her way from the school area, she was jittery and said so many things and named someone she suspected... my immediate reaction was to calm her down and to pick out the relevant information from all she had said, before I counselled her on the next point of action to take.’

### **On tools to take action for social change and its impact on the students**

Hackman in his work stressed the importance of this component by stating that the traditional notions portrayed in our universities disempower students in the belief

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<sup>34</sup> Casey T ‘Reflective practice in legal education: The stages of reflection’ [2014] *Clinical Law Review*, 20.

that they (the students) are unable to effect any change in the society or community. This in turn communicates to the students' feelings of cynicism and despair. However, when students are empowered with specific tools for action and social change, they know that they represent the voice for hope in their respective communities. Spurred by this belief, they take actions which vary according to the content and environment. This ranges from taking power via grassroots protests to inter group dialogue through writing and literature development.

When questions relating to how clinic related activities has encouraged social action change in the students, various responses were given, for a particular student, she was able to engage in insightful conversations on domestic violence and thereafter embark on public awareness against domestic violence in her community.

Another student said as follows:

'In my community, there are still families that practice female genital mutilation, by virtue of the position I hold in the community as a youth leader, I swung into action and alongside others, we were able to begin sensitization campaigns for families in the community... it was good we did this, because a particular woman who was on the verge of circumcising her female child decided against doing so, we were able to educate her about the ills of carrying out such acts. What started as a small community engagement is gradually becoming bigger. We had another instance where a man who had twins (a boy and a girl) said he was only willing to educate the male child while the female

child would not go to school. After our intervention, the man was enlightened about the dangers of not educating his children. Now on monthly basis, we hold meetings with mothers where we train families on diverse issues’.

Another student narrated her experience with a neighbour who often assaulted his wife, ‘I understood that the problem was because the wife was not gainfully engaged, I knew I had to do something, what I did was to counsel this woman, I advocated for funds for empowerment for her and now she is now financially independent and there is relative peace in her home.’

The phrase ‘think globally, act locally’ has been an integral part of climate change action. It embodies the idea that rather than wait for grand intervention to fix the world, we should implement environmentally conscious solutions into everyday decisions and actions which can aggregately have a globally transformative effect.<sup>35</sup> When applied to clinical legal education and social justice, this phrase enables students to develop an understanding of how classroom content connects with larger issues in society. In the context of this study, this phrase implies that it is more effective for an individual to take steps within his/her local environment rather than wait for global action to address societal challenges. The phrase becomes more important to the students because societal challenges are constantly changing. In Nigeria, the current economic realities have brought about different societal challenges which

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<sup>35</sup> Anne Mikilska ‘Think globally, Act locally...think globally again’ available at <http://www.riskcenter.wharton.upenn.edu> accessed on 8 December 2022.

hitherto did not exist. For example, Goment et al<sup>36</sup> examined the impact of the pandemic and saw it as a threat to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. According to them, the pronounced effect of the pandemic in Nigeria was shown in crime, poverty and unemployment rates and reported that there was an increase in organized crime, rising levels of cybercrime, violent crimes, gender-based domestic violence, spread of poverty to urban areas and increased youth unemployment.

With the aforementioned, there will likely be an increased need for legal representation which student clinicians who have been imparted with social justice skills can possibly meet. It begins with the students taking decisive steps to take individual steps to address societal needs. About 85% of the students who participated in this study had not heard of the phrase 'think globally, act locally before. Amongst the students who had knowledge of the phrase, one said 'as an individual it means that I should not wait for anyone before I take action concerning societal ills and injustice'. Another said 'it means I should focus on my local environment and the small acts I engage in will add up leading to a positive change in my community.'

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Imoudu Goment, Musa Aboda, Audu Mohammed and Alih Lami 'The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigeria: A substantial threat to the attainment of sustainable development goals [2022] Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa (24)(1) 43-53.

### **On tools for awareness of group multicultural dynamics**

Questions on this aspect were posed to the law students and the depth of responses came from the focus group discussion sessions held with the students. When the students were asked on whose rights were pre-eminent in the groups when assigned to joint tasks in the clinic. The responses of the students varied as students' clinicians in particular those who hailed from other parts of the country (specifically the South-East and the South-West) affirmed that they mostly did not see themselves or their identities as part of the clinic teams. When probed further, two of the students said that in some instances, they saw that their reasoning on topical issues at the clinic was at variance with the opinion of other group members who were in the majority. They attributed this to their cultural upbringing which differed from the cultural background of other members. In other words, cultural barriers made them feel inadequate in their sense of belonging.

Other questions posed to the students during the focus group discussions was to know how they arrived at decisions when given group tasks. In response, the students said that 'majority have their way and minority have their say'. The meaning of this statement was that a greater number had an overriding voice in decision making, which also meant a greater number linked by the same ethnicity. In the other FGD group, which was the male FGD group, the male students added that in certain instances where a major decision was to be arrived at, they could resort to voting where there was a tie, and the team lead had an additional vote to resolve the tie.



An awareness of group multicultural dynamics is essential to the success and training of the students. Findings showed that students from the predominant ethnic group were seen to have higher abilities to trump on the decisions of others in the group, they were also more likely to become impatient where their opinions were not understood. Suffice to say that the ethnic makeup of a group should not be a reason to leave important or critical issues unaddressed or to make any member of a group feel marginalised. Although Hackman's exposition on group multicultural dynamics focused on classroom dynamics, and the socially constructed identities of the teachers and students, Hackman's discussion was relatable to the students' experience at the WLC. It is submitted that understanding these dynamics and how they play out rather than avoiding discussions and debates on them altogether would lead to a more effective and engaging law clinic. In this study, this component has not been well harnessed as the cultural diversity meant to bring in a wealth of experience to group tasks was in fact the main reason behind indecisiveness in the team.

### **Clinical legal education and social justice education: Implications for future research**

Maisel<sup>37</sup> articulated three goals which clinical legal education ought to accomplish, the first being to ensure increased access to justice for previously under-represented

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<sup>37</sup> Peggy Maisel, Shaheda mahomed and Meetali Jain ' Clinical Legal Education's contribution to building constitutionalism and democracy in South Africa, present, past and future' [2016] New York Law School Review (60)(2) 433-460.

groups, the second being to advance a system of legal education that ensures future lawyers have the knowledge, skills and values needed to serve the world's complex problems and third a legal profession that is more diverse, skilled and committed to serving social needs. In the aftermath of COVID -19 pandemic, there were reported increase in crimes and vices. Another profound effect of the pandemic was felt in the economic and financial sector, the implication of this is that there is bound to be more members of the society who will be unable to afford legal representation in whatever form it may be required, increased need to sensitize community members about their rights. The importance of the impact of CLE and social justice values on the training of the students come to play here as the training received enables them to take action and steps to influence their communities and also to have a sense of societal responsiveness. This research focused only on students in training and did not capture the impact on students who graduated from the UI-WLC. Another research may be required to document the long- term impact of social justice education values on law graduates.

Findings in this study has shown that participation in the UI-WLC through various activities and programs has had a positive effect on the social values of the students, it has also shown how it has discouraged a few students when they saw practical aspects of what they had been taught in classroom teaching in real life situations. In all, the purpose of clinical legal education has been served, but that is not to say it has achieved its best ends. The students were asked to give suggestions on how the aims

of the UI-WLC can be better furthered. The students opined that there was still more to be done in the area of publicity in order to create more awareness on what the UI-WLC had to offer to the community. It should also be borne in mind that one of the impetus that also gave rise to this research was the changing needs of the society occasioned by the aftermath of the pandemic on virtually all sectors of the Nigerian economy. This was immediately felt in the nature of the cases that were brought to the clinic.

The UI-WLC witnessed a surge in cases of domestic violence, child custody and immigration matters. Ibitoye and Ajagunna<sup>38</sup> had reported in research conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and found that the pandemic had both positive and negative impacts on women's sexual autonomy. For the UI-WLC, the focus now should be on training students to make positive impacts through the clinic activities and outreach programs. There is need to conduct more sensitization campaigns in the community to educate the populace on their rights most especially women and children.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibitoye T.R. & Ajagunna F.O. 'Sexual autonomy and violence against women in Nigeria: Assessing the impact of Covid-19 pandemic' [2021] *De Jure Law Journal* 141- 159 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2225-7160/2021/v54a9> accessed 31 December 2022.

## **Conclusion**

Social justice values are crucial for students in society as they teach them to value fairness, equality and respect towards others regardless of their background. These skills help promote diversity, inclusion and tolerance which are essential elements in any community. By ensuring that students develop a strong ethics-based education system that integrates social justice principles into the syllabus, we can foster a more cohesive and harmonious society where everyone has equal opportunities irrespective of their socio-economic status or race. This research has documented how the training received through the WLC has had varying impacts both positive and negative in the Clinic. For the positive impacts, these can still be made better and improved upon, However, for the negative aspects as revealed in the findings especially in the area of group multicultural dynamics, there is still a lot more to be done to be done at the UI-WLC. Incorporating social justice values goes beyond what transpires in the classroom as real-life experiences of same have longer lasting life transforming impacts on the students, which can in turn impact on their immediate communities. A lesson learned for the UI-WLC as seen in this research could also serve as a guideline for other established law clinics. It is therefore imperative that educators incorporate these values into their teaching curriculum not only for academic excellence but also for building better human beings.