



THE ROLE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN INDIA AND NIGERIA

Dr. Showkat Ahmad Wani¹  and Ms Renuka²

1. Associate Professor, School of Law, Alliance University, Bengaluru India. Email: showkat.wani@alliance.edu.in showkatamu001@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, Presidency University Bengaluru, India. Email: 215rjaggirenuka@gmail.com

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The present research paper is based on a doctrinal study of the interrelation between legal education, civic engagement, social responsibility and social inclusion in India and Nigeria. The study investigates how legal education, particularly clinical legal education (CLE) can act as a catalyst for social change by fostering public participation, legal empowerment and empowerment of marginalised communities. The study comparatively analyses of legal education in both the countries, focusing on access to justice institutions, community -based legal services and expanding role of civil technology. The study also emphasises the post-colonial development of legal education in India and Nigeria and highlights how both countries have used CLE as a mechanism for addressing social inequality and democratic deficits. Simultaneously, it also delineated the differences in policy implementation, use of technology and models of community lawyering. Further the research connects the legal education with global development discourses, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and assesses the contribution of CLE towards peace, justice, and inclusive institutions. Special attention is given to marginalized sections like Dalits, tribal people, and the poor in rural areas, and internally displaced persons in Nigeria. The article presents normative and policy suggestions regarding the use of CLE not just as a teaching technique but as a mean to strengthen democratic participation and constitutional values. It contends that law schools need to reimagine their role and function as spaces that promote inclusiveness to generate an active, justice-oriented legal profession for the 21st century. The study concludes that legal education should play a stronger role in line with international human rights commitments and national constitutional norms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Clinical Legal Education is defined as experiential legal education integrating classroom instruction with live-client representation, legal aid clinics, and community legal services.¹ More than a pedagogical method, CLE represents a philosophical commitment to using legal education as an instrument of social transformation. It enables law students to develop practical advocacy skills, professional ethics, and social consciousness through direct engagement with real legal problems affecting vulnerable populations. Through live-client clinics, legal aid camps, prison outreach, and social justice initiatives, CLE not only enriches student's professional capabilities but also instils civic awareness, making legal education a vehicle for democratic participation and empowerment.²

The methodology covers a variety of approaches: law clinics that offer free legal services to needy communities, law school attachment programs that provide structured practical-law training in professional settings, moot court competitions that develop advocacy skills and outreach programs that facilitate legal literacy in needy communities.³

At its core, CLE rejects the traditional law school model whereby students were imbibing traditional methods focusing only on transmitting knowledge through lectures and isolating the significance of social context. Instead, CLE positions students as participants in the justice system itself, engaging with real legal problems affecting real people. This engagement creates what educators' term "transformative learning" not merely transferring legal knowledge, but developing the judgment, ethical sensitivity, and professional commitment necessary for lawyers serving marginalized communities.

In the 21st century, it is imperative to transform Clinical Legal Education (CLE) in India and Nigeria. The centuries old of increasing socio-

¹ N.R. Madhava Menon, *A Handbook on Clinical Legal Education* (Eastern Book Co 2023) 25.

² Margaret Martin Barry, Jon C Dubin and Peter A Joy, 'Clinical Education for This Millennium: The Third Wave' (2000) 7 *Clinical Law Review* 1, 8–15.

³ R.K. Singh, 'Clinical Legal Education—A Robust Instrument for Social Change' (2022) 52(1) *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 89, 91–98.

economic inequalities, lack of democratic will, and institutional barriers to systemic injustice should be eliminated by the power of institutional change and political will. Both countries, which are characterized by their postcolonial legal systems and their pluralistic cultures are struggling with the persistent challenges of giving fair access to justice especially to historically marginalized groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, women, religious minorities, rural residents and low-income urban communities. Traditional law schools, mostly followed doctrinal pedagogy, frequently neglects to impart practical skills, ethical sensitivity, or civic duty to its students. By offering law students the essential critical lawyering skills and a grounded sense of the extent to which the law reaches vulnerable populations, CLE, in combining experiential learning with public service, becomes a liberating force. CLE not only imparts professional competence to the student, but also instils awareness of civic duty, and makes legal education an instrument of democratic engagement, and social empowerment.⁴

The theoretical promise of legal systems breaks down when marginalized groups face tangible impediments to justice. Dalits and Adivasis experience systematic discrimination in law institutions, and research has documented cases where the law courts themselves have perpetuated the discriminatory attitude based on caste.⁵ Women in both countries face gender-specific challenges such as discrimination in family law, disputes over property rights, and cases of sexual violence, which are enhanced by the cultural norms restricting access to formal justice.⁶ Religious minorities experience procedural discrimination and bias in dispute resolution. Procedural discrimination and bias in dispute resolution are applied against the religious minorities. The rural population have no geographical access to courts and qualified counsel, leading to a two-tier justice system. The urban poor are not able to pay litigation costs and

⁴ Terry Hutchinson and Nigel Duncan, 'Defining and Describing What We Do: Doctrinal Legal Research' (2012) 17(1) *Deakin Law Review* 83. <https://doi.org/10.21153/dlr2012vol17no1art70>

⁵ IDSN, *Caste Discrimination and Human Rights: A Compilation of UN Documents* (International Dalit Solidarity Network 2021) 23–35.

⁶ Oluyemisi Bamgbose, 'Access to Justice Through Clinical Legal Education: A Way Forward for Nigerian Women' (2015) 31(2) *South African Journal on Human Rights* 189, 194–203.

therefore access to justice is not a right but a commodity. In the absence of specific interventions, these groups continue to be what scholars define as “hearers of the existence of justice as opposed to actualisers of justice.”⁷

CLE is responding to these obstacles by making law students agents of legal empowerment in communities. Law students acquire the lived experience of the failures of the justice system and learn to intervene based on what the community already knows.

To achieve principal objectives of social and economic justice through CLE, the law universities as well as other educational institutions need to work and recognise the value of experiential learning to incorporate CLE into their curriculum. The schools and civil societies must be empowered through legal empowerment initiatives by making legal literate and community lawyering. Legal aid organizations and Clinical Legal Education programs need to be put into compliance with Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), which focuses on access to justice and accountable institutions. The combination of CLE with community development programs is especially important in poor rural and semi-urban societies where formal justice systems are still out of reach. This shows how legal education can transcend the classroom setting and encounter real problems which vulnerable and marginalised communities are experiencing in both countries.

At the international level, the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education (2020-2024) underscores that empowering educators to advance human rights requires “participatory, community-led approaches of which CLE is a prime example.”⁸ Clinical Legal Education directly supports three interconnected Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 4 (Quality Education) through embedding experiential learning; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by prioritizing marginalized communities; and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong

⁷ C. O. Oba, ‘Third Party Litigation Funding and Access to Civil Litigation: Prospects and Challenges in Nigeria’ (2015) 2 *African Journal of Clinical Legal Education and Access to Justice* 23–57.

⁸ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Fourth Phase (2020–2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education* (United Nations 2020) 12–18.

Institutions) by enhancing access to justice and institutional accountability.⁹

Therefore, CLE not only presents itself as a pedagogic innovation but as a democratic necessity. By integrating social justice into the core of legal education, it brings educational institutions in line with the constitutional obligations contained in Articles 39A and 51A of the Indian Constitution, and Sections 17 and 18 of the Nigerian Constitution, which underscore egalitarianism, social justice, and civic responsibility. The primary purpose of CLE is to renew legal education by providing remedial access to justice by engaging legal knowledge in the interests of the marginalised communities. As the fourth phase of the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education (2020–2024) underlines, empowering educators to act on behalf of human rights involves participatory, community led approaches of which CLE is a prime example. Hence, the sustained institutionalisation of CLE in India and Nigeria is not just an academic reform but a socio-political intervention critical to deepening rule of law, participatory governance, and civic engagement in civilised democracies.

Modern constitutional democracies follow law education that serves a dual role to train legal professionals but also invests society with civic values. Whereas historically considered through the prism of vocational training, more recent jurisprudence envisioned the democratic promise of legal pedagogy as a push to civic engagement and social conscience among students. This research examines to what extent of legal education as a democratic institution functions in India and Nigeria and how inclusive rule and participatory citizenship are promoted. Both countries, as post-colonial democracies, are faced with institutionalized exclusions and deep-rooted social inequalities and therefore legal education is an empowering space of change.

The research analyses the constitutional provisions, statutory obligations, case laws, and institutional dimensions that are responsible for legal education's democratic engagement. Special emphasis is placed on building

⁹ V. Ramachandran, 'Legal Education and Sustainable Development Goals: The Indian Experience' (2022) 15 *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 78, 88–96.

and institutionalizing clinical legal education (CLE) and how it will turn out to be beneficial in access to justice. Comparative lessons are given to study how different legal pedagogies and systems of government shape the establishment and effect of civic legal education.

The Indian Constitution establishes education as a fundamental right under Article 21-A and mandates civic responsibility under Article 51A(c), which obligates all citizens to uphold the Constitution and promote its ideals. Article 39A explicitly mandates that “the State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid”. Similarly, the Nigerian Constitution, under Sections 17 and 18, emphasizes egalitarianism, social justice, and educational advancement. Through the Nigerian Constitution, Nigeria has incorporated equal participation and non-discrimination in public life. In both countries, legal education is made into a tool not just of professionalisation but also of building a culture of democratic civic responsibility, legal empowerment, and equity-based inclusion.

At a time of global democratic retreat, ascending authoritarian forces, and civic frustration enmasse, the function of legal education as a keystone of democratic society has never been a priority. Legal education is not a technical school conveyor belt; it is the construction of interpreters and enforcers of the social contract. It can possibly shape civic consciousness, teach constitutional ethics, and allow subordinated voices to be inserted into functioning public life. But legal education in most post-colonial countries, including India and Nigeria, has generally been heavily shielded away from such ideals of transformation. Instead, it has functioned as an elite reproduction caretaker, out of reach for the poor, minorities, and most of all, the rural poor, who need legal empowerment the most.¹⁰

Backsliding democracies and decreased public trust in the legal institutions only further highlight the need to remediate legal education toward civic engagement and social inclusion. India and Nigeria, according to the V-

¹⁰ Alok Prasanna Kumar, ‘Madhava Menon and Legal Education’ (2019) 54(20) *Economic and Political Weekly* 10–11. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/20/law-and-society/madhava-menon-and-legal-education.html> accessed 2 Jan 2026.

Dem Institute's Democracy Report 2024, have experienced a measurable retreat from liberal democratic norms like freedom of speech, judicial independence, and civic society participation.¹¹ Both countries legal education systems must perform well not merely by turning out skilled litigators but by turning out socially conscious legal practitioners who can advocate for civil liberties and push the limits of participatory government.

Clinical Legal Education (CLE) is a significant framework for such transformation. By combining legal doctrine with actual, community-based problem-solving, CLE closes the distance between the academy and the citizen, between the classroom and the courtroom. CLE reorients the pedagogy of law from memorization to experiential learning in justice, allowing students to solve real legal issues facing low-income members of society.¹² In the process, CLE builds a culture of democracy within the law, empowering the next generation of lawyers who recognise the law, not as a tool of status, but of service.

Further, legal education converges with global development objectives, specifically the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 16, peace, justice, and institutions, aligns access to justice and legal empowerment at the nexus of sustainable development objectives. Law schools, by incorporating CLE, human rights education, and universal curricula, become strategic enforcers in moving these international objectives forward.¹³

This study is a comparative of Indian and Nigerian legal education and its role in enabling civic engagement and social inclusion. It considers institutionalisation of CLE, its challenges, and normative reforms towards making legal education conform to democratic renewal. By locating the experience of excluded communities and the evolution of legal pedagogy,

¹¹ V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2024: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization* (2024). Available at v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf

¹² Margaret Martin Barry, Jon C. Dubin & Peter A. Joy, *Clinical Education for This Millennium: The Third Wave*, 7 Clinical L. Rev. 1 (2000). Available at https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_scholarship/828/

¹³ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UNGA Res 70/1, UN Doc A/RES/70/1 (21 October 2015). Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

this study aims to reimagine law schools as civic centres within the constitutional democracies of the Global South.¹⁴

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Legal education must be understood not simply as the end of the production of legal professionals but as a foundational pillar in democratic governments. This development is situated within this broader democratic environment. The conceptual framework of this paper is at the intersection of three core ideas, i.e., democracy, civic engagement, and inclusion, meeting in the extent of pedagogy. Democracy is at its core participatory government, equal justice under law, and rule of law. As John Rawls would say, to quote him, “A just society is one that guarantees the equal liberties of its members and secures the basic structures of fair cooperation and mutual advantage.”¹⁵ Legal education, in return, becomes an essential component to make such freedoms a reality, especially through its impact on public reasoning and civic literacy. Paulo Freire’s “*critical pedagogy*” provides a convincing model too to see the possibility of transformation of legal education. To Freire, education must impart critical consciousness to students so that they might critically problematise oppressive social structures and become active participants in democratic life.¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum enters this conversation by promoting a “*capabilities approach*” to education, which mandates that liberal education and legal education as a whole must develop essential human capabilities like critical thinking, empathetic understanding, and civic participation.¹⁷ In postcolonial nations like India and Nigeria, these pedagogic values take on additional significance since the colonial legal system legacy continues to shape access to justice as well as marginalization of vulnerable groups.¹⁸

¹⁴ M Nzime, ‘Legal Education in South Africa: Racialized Globalizations, Crises, and Resistance’ in A L Baxi, P Trubek and R Vora (eds), *Legal Education in Post-Colonial Societies: Comparative Studies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Oxford University Press 2020) ch 4. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197632314.003.0004>

¹⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press 1971).

¹⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary edn, Continuum 2000).

¹⁷ Martha C Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard University Press 2011).

¹⁸ Omoyemen L Odigie-Emmanuel and Shiksha Dahiya, ‘The Role of Legal Clinics in Promoting Human Rights: The Experience of Nigeria Law School Yenagoa Law Clinic and

In India, N. R. Madhava Menon's contribution to legal pedagogy, i.e., the development of clinical legal education (CLE), is an indigenization pedagogy movement that resonates with Freirean as well as Nussbaumian philosophies.¹⁹

3. LEGAL EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN INDIA

There has been revolutionary growth of Indian legal education since independence, from the apprenticeship model to the university-type model of law courses regulated by the Bar Council of India (BCI). The most potent transformation of it is the introduction and incorporation of Clinical Legal Education (CLE) pioneered by N. R. Madhava Menon and codified in the Legal Education Rules, 2008.²⁰ CLE's in India not only reshaped the pedagogy culture of legal education but also acted as a crucial driver in enabling civic participation and democratic engagement, primarily among marginalized and disenfranchised citizens.

Article 51A of the Indian Constitution, clause (j), obliges all citizens to make a joint effort at their best capacity to achieve excellence in all areas of individual and collective effort.²¹ The directive principle articulates the ideal norm of what is worth achieving that legal education must seek beyond professional training to meaningful contribution to public life. Aside from this, Article 39A enacted by the 42nd Amendment is upholding equal justice and free legal aid, that is, a constitutional mandate that has informed concepts of legal literacy and CLE schemes.²² The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), created under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, has worked in partnership with Indian law schools for institutionalizing legal aid clinics using CLE schemes.²³

the Legal Support and Care Centre at GD Goenka University' (2023) 30 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 4–56. <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v30i1.1331>

¹⁹ NR Madhava Menon, *A Handbook on Clinical Legal Education* (Eastern Book Co 2023).

²⁰ Bar Council of India, *Rules of Legal Education – 2019* (Bar Council of India 2019). Available at <https://d5wa1rycpxuyp.cloudfront.net/bci/feeds/archive/02-32-draft-rules-of-legal-education-2019.pdf>

²¹ Constitution of India 1950, art 51A(j).

²² Ibid. art 39A; see also the 42nd Amendment Act 1976.

²³ Legal Services Authorities Act 1987, s 3A.

One of India's most famous CLE projects is the Increasing Diversity by Increasing Access to Legal Education (IDIA) project, which identifies and mentor students from disadvantaged groups to emerge as high achievers at law schools.²⁴ IDIA not only expands the legal profession but also instils a culture of civic participation and legal empowerment among peers. The existing research identifies that student participation in legal aid clinics improves the understanding of socio-legal issues and chances of graduation as *pro bono* lawyers.²⁵

Judicial decisions have also assisted in supporting active participation by the people by providing legal education. In *State of Maharashtra v. Manubhai Pragaji Vashi*, the Supreme Court advised that there must be a facility for legal education to render justice accessible.²⁶ Likewise, in *All India Judges Association v. Union of India*, the Court reaffirmed continuing legal education as an issue of judicial autonomy and democratic responsibility.²⁷ Another important judgment by the Honourable Supreme Court of India in *Inamdar Vahab Badasha v. Symbiosis Society*, whereby the Court highlighted the importance of legal education and its alignment with the promised constitutional goals of advancing social justice and change. The Court also pointed out that law should serve as an instrument of social change and should not compromise the standards and objectives of legal education.²⁸

Educational institutions like National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore, and Symbiosis Law School, Pune, have also been pioneers in CLE by incorporating community-based learning, field study,

²⁴ IDIA, *Increasing Diversity by Increasing Access: Empowering Underprivileged and Marginalised Children through Legal Education* (IDIA 2020). Available at <https://www.idialaw.org/>

²⁵ Faizan Mustafa, Jagtreshwar Singh Sohi, Sidharth Chauhan, Sudhanshu Kumar & Vaibhav Ganjiwale, *A Study to Create Evidence-Based Proposals for Reform of Legal Education in India-Phase II* (Scheme for Action Research and Studies on Judicial Reforms, Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India 2021). Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4517431>

²⁶ *State of Maharashtra v Manubhai Pragaji Vashi* (1995) 5 SCC 730

²⁷ *All India Judges Association v Union of India* (1992) 1 SCC 119

²⁸ *Vahab Badasha v. Symbiosis Society* AIR 1984 Bom 451

and documentation of human rights within the curriculum.²⁹ These form a part of the worldwide movement towards transformatory legal education looking for students as change agents rather than receptacles of information. Legal education plays a vital role in changing and moulding society. The Government of India in 2020 has introduced the New Education Policy (NEP), which is considered the most ambitious educational policy ever. Still, many legal experts have raised concerns about whether the new policy is efficient in meeting critical flaws of legal education in India and its implementation.³⁰

CLE in India also enables citizen participation through enhanced legal literacy. Constitutional rights, labour law, and gender justice awareness camps conducted among the poor and marginal sections of the urban and rural poor have been key to the building of participatory governance.³¹ The spirit of justice lies in the grassroots of democracy that are constructed by involving law students as champions of constitutional values. Such success notwithstanding, CLE in India continues to be determined by budgetary deficits, institutional opposition, and uneven regulation enforcement.³² Furthermore, even where there are widespread BCI requirements of CLE, their enforcement also remains institutionally irregular. Through structural reform and heightened commitment towards the incorporation of civic responsibility within the curriculum of law schools, CLE may again be reasserted.

²⁹ Centre for Research and Planning, *Legal Aid through Law Schools: A Report on Working of Legal Aid Cells in India* (Supreme Court of India, October 2024). Available at <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ec0490f1f4972d133619a60c30f3559e/uploads/2024/11/2024110665.pdf>

³⁰ Sanjit Kumar Chakraborty and Tushar Krishna, 'Promises and Prospects of Legal Education in India in the Context of the New Education Policy: A Reality Check' (2021) 9(1) *Asian Journal of Legal Education* 64. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/23220058211065983>

³¹ Shalu Nigam, *Legal Literacy: A Tool for Empowerment* (Social Action Trust, Indian Social Institute 2008). Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2976377

³² Shoyaib Ahmad and Raj Kumar, *Transforming Legal Education in India: The Role of Clinical Legal Education and Trial Advocacy* (Cambridge Open Engage Working Paper, 14 May 2025). Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.33774/coe-2025-12ncq>

4. LEGAL EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Nigerian legal education is in a pivotal place in the pursuit of democratic government, civic conscience, and social justice. Like India, Nigeria inherited colonial law dominance that at one time excluded indigenous norms and restricted access to legal institutions. Post-colonial legal reforms have been struggling with democratisation of legal knowledge and empowering future legal professionals to be able to contribute meaningfully to public life. At the heart of this revolution is the inclusion of Clinical Legal Education (CLE), which became compulsory in legal education in accordance with directives issued by the Nigerian Bar Association and the Council of Legal Education.³³

The Nigerian constitutional structure provides substance to the normative ground for citizen engagement through the medium of legal education. Section 17(1)(e) of the 1999 Constitution focuses on the promotion of a just and equitable society, while Section 18 is geared towards the development of educational infrastructure.³⁴ The said provisions, as non-justiciable under Chapter II, guide legal education policy and programming development. The Legal Education (Consolidation, etc.) Act of 1976 also regulates the Nigerian Law School for the administration of standard professional training in Nigeria.³⁵ The work of law clinics in Nigeria has increased significantly because of the pioneering work of the Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI) since 2003. NULAI has helped make institutionalisation of CLE in Nigerian law schools a reality through training, guidelines, and regulation for legal aid

³³ *Legal Education (Consolidation, etc.) Act* No 12 of 1976, Cap L10, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.

³⁴ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, ss 17–18. Explanation of the Section 17 and 18: Section 17 lays down the fundamental principles of Nigeria's social order, emphasizing freedom, equality, justice, human dignity, and humane government actions. Section 18 outlines the State's educational objectives, directing government policy to provide equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels, eradicate illiteracy, and promote free primary, secondary, and tertiary education, as well as adult literacy programs.

³⁵ *Ibid* s 5; see also Council of Legal Education, 'Guidelines for Legal Education in Nigeria' (2020).

clinics.³⁶ NULAI works with universities, the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria, and external donors in order to expand justice for all and make students capable of civic consciousness.³⁷ Also, the Legal Aid Act 2011 provides the operational framework for legal aid in Nigeria, including scope, beneficiaries, and recognition of non-state actors (NGOs, law clinics, paralegals). Section 17 of the Act expressly recognizes university law clinics as legal aid providers alongside other actors, reflecting a broader, Lilongwe-influenced concept of legal aid.³⁸

The already existing literature evidence illustrates the power of transformation that CLE can bring about in Nigeria. Odigie-Emmanuel and Dahiya report, for instance, student activism by students of the Nigeria Law School Yenagoa Law Clinic in human rights and interaction with society and hence increased student civic participation and awareness of the law.³⁹ Fatoki similarly reports improved access to the law as legal services by universities for the indigent.⁴⁰ Besides learning through doing, these clinics also impart democratic values of participation, equality, and accountability.

Its high-visibility cases are the University of Ibadan Women's Law Clinic, empowering women in the nearby communities as well as female students through rights-based legal education and pro bono legal representation.⁴¹

³⁶ Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI-Nigeria), *Legal Empowerment through Law Schools: Report and Reflections* (NAMATI 2012). <https://grassrootsjusticenetwork.org/connect/organization/network-of-university-legal-aid-institutions-nulai-nigeria/>

³⁷ *Legal Aid Council of Nigeria Act 2011*, s 8. See also Olanike S Adedokun-Odewale, 'Role of Clinical Legal Education in Social Justice in Nigeria' (2017) 5(1) *Asian Journal of Legal Education*. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/2322005817730148>

³⁸ Ernest Ojukwu and Mahmud Yusuf, 'Mapping the Role of Law Clinics under the Legal Aid Act of Nigeria' (2022) 11(3) *International Review of Law* 197.

³⁹ Omoyemen L Odigie-Emmanuel and Shiksha Dahiya, 'The Role of Legal Clinics in Promoting Human Rights: The Experience of Nigeria Law School Yenagoa Law Clinic and the Legal Support and Care Centre at GD Goenka University' (2023) 30 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 4–56. <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v30i1.1331>

⁴⁰ Yewande Fatoki, *The Role of University Law Clinics in Expanding Access to Justice in Nigeria* (Faculty of Law, Lead City University, Ibadan, March 2025). Available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15428738>

⁴¹ Omolade Olomola and Oluyemisi Bamgbose, 'Collaborating with other Disciplines: Best Practice for Legal Clinics – A Case Study of the Women's Law Clinic, University of Ibadan

Another is the Legal Support and Care Centre in GD Goenka University, set up in collaboration with Nigerian partners.⁴² Such benefits across borders exemplify the growing embrace being extended to CLE as a social inclusion instrument across borders. The Nigerian courts also enable civic-tech interventions that bridge legal education and participatory democracy. Civic movements like Citizens Gavel and Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) involve law students with internship and partnership opportunities. These initiatives utilize digital technology to enhance legal literacy, access to information, and government transparency.⁴³

Despite such encouraging trends, Nigerian CLE is encumbered by structural imperative forces that impede its development, such as inadequate funding, bureaucratic impediments, and opposition from traditional legal academia.⁴⁴ Availability gaps for legal aid clinics between urban and rural communities further restrict rural access. However, it should be noted that the collective work of NULAI and partners has rooted CLE as a central pillar of democratic legal pedagogy. The doctrinal value of CLE in Nigeria transcends legal empowerment to civic identity construction. As Arimoro has noted, the graduates of CLE training exhibit more publicly aware public interest consciousness, that is, sustained active participation in community-based legal activism.⁴⁵ Conclusively, CLE has reshaped legal education in Nigeria from an unusual emphasis on practice in court to an overall goal of democratic citizenship.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: INDIA AND NIGERIA

Nigeria' (2014) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*. Available at <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v19i0.35>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), *Who We Are*. Available at <https://serap-nigeria.org/>. See also Citizens' Gavel Foundation for Social Justice. Available at <https://citizensgavel.org/about>

⁴⁴ Folakemi O Ajagunna and Ibijoke Byron, 'Clinical Legal Education and Social Justice: Assessing the Impact on Law Students in a Law Clinic in Nigeria' (2024) 31(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 44. Available at <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v31i1.1380>

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

The comparative analysis of the Indian and Nigerian legal education systems demonstrates both common post-colonial legacies and jurisdiction-specific ones in synthesizing civic engagement into pedagogy for law. The two jurisdictions have both long struggled with inherent social cleavages, limited access to justice, and elitist-biased legal orders. Legal education as Clinical Legal Education (CLE) has become a strategic initiative in advancing democratic citizenship and social inclusion in the two jurisdictions.

One such intersection is legislative and constitutional commitment to democratizing education and legal assistance. India's Articles 39A and 51A of the Constitution are utopian declarations of justice and civic responsibility.⁴⁶ Nigeria's constitutional values in Sections 17 and 18 of the Constitution of 1999 are likewise focused on egalitarianism and educational advancement. Although these provisions are always not judicially enforceable, they are normative standards against which policymaking must progress.⁴⁷

Both jurisdictions have facilitated the development of participatory legal philosophy through CLE. Indian National Law Universities, in particular, have developed robust CLE system based on public interest law practice and experiential learning.⁴⁸ Nigeria, under the management of NULAI, has institutionalized CLE in more than 30 universities, commonly with local human rights issues at the centre.⁴⁹ However, these efforts show the promise of CLE to integrate legal academic education with actual democratic practice. Structural and implementation-level differences do persist. In India, robust judiciary and regulatory support notwithstanding, CLE is often marred by inconsistency of implementation in private and

⁴⁶ Constitution of India 1950, art 39A. "The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities".

⁴⁷ Const. of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, ss 17–18 (n 34).

⁴⁸ N R Madhava Menon, *Reflections on Legal and Judicial Education* (LexisNexis Butterworths 2009)

⁴⁹ NULAI Nigeria, *Executive Summary: NULAI Nigeria 2022 Annual Report* (2022). Available at <https://nulai.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/NULAI-NIGERIA-2022-ANNUAL-REPORT.pdf>

public law schools.⁵⁰ Moreover, the top-down model of reform by the Bar Council of India limits innovation at the grass-roots level. In contrast, Nigeria's CLE movement has benefitted from a more decentralized and NGO-driven structure, particularly through NULAI's collaborations with international actors and civil society organizations.⁵¹

A second area of divergence involves the integration of technology and civic-tech into legal pedagogy. Nigeria has witnessed the growth of civic-tech innovations bridging legal education with democratic engagement, for instance, mobile legal aid platforms and online awareness campaigns by Citizens Gavel and SERAP.⁵² Indian development has been slow, and online legal literacy is still urban and institutional in nature. This technology gap implies that there needs to be a broader digital legal education policy in India. Both jurisdictions face similar problems like underfunding, underdevelopment of faculty capacity, and opposition from old-style academic interest groups. But the survival of the CLE models in both contexts testifies to the resilience of legal education in the service of democratic values. The comparative lesson is that CLE needs to be enshrined as a constitutional requirement and not as an added pedagogical pediment. Furthermore, both countries also have lessons that can be learned from each other to make CLE more robust in achieving democratic goals, particularly for marginalised communities. India's court experience of public interest litigation (PIL) as a teaching instrument can be adopted in Nigerian CLE practice. In turn, Nigeria's grassroots, people-focused legal empowerment programs in rural settings have

⁵⁰ Shivani Salunke, 'Legal Education in India: Reflecting on the Past for a Brighter Future' (2024) 12(2) *Asian Journal of Legal Education* 216. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/23220058241305560>

⁵¹ Omoyemen L Odigie-Emmanuel and Shiksha Dahiya, 'The Role of Legal Clinics in Promoting Human Rights: The Experience of Nigeria Law School Yenagoa Law Clinic and the Legal Support and Care Centre at GD Goenka University' (2023) 30 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 4–56. <https://doi.org/10.19164/ijcle.v30i1.1331>

⁵² Kabiru Aderemi Adeyemo, Simeon Olaosebikan Oni and Godwin Emmanuel Oyedokun (eds), *Pursuit of Legal Education: Essays Marking the 20th Anniversary of Lead City University, Ibadan* (Faculty of Law, Lead City University 2025).

provided ground lessons for Indian institutions aspiring to take their services out of the city.⁵³

Overall, the comparative path of CLE in India and Nigeria bears witness to its place in the middle ground of legal empowerment, civic action, and participatory governance. It validates the hypothesis that legal education, rooted in democratic principles and civil society engagement, can be an inclusive development force.

However, structural and implementation-related disparities exist. In India, despite strong judicial and regulatory support, CLE often faces inconsistencies in implementation across private and public law schools.⁵⁴ Moreover, the top-down nature of reforms through the Bar Council of India limits grassroots innovation. In contrast, Nigeria's CLE movement has benefitted from a more decentralized and NGO-driven structure, particularly through NULAI's collaborations with international actors and civil society organizations.⁵⁵

6. CONCLUSION

The changing notion of clinical legal education in both India and Nigeria offers a strong imperative to re-conceive the role of law schools as main instrument of social change. The persistent challenges of inequality, marginalisation, and restricted access to justice are prevailing across both jurisdictions, especially among socio-economically disadvantaged groups. In this sense therefore, legal education must transcend the traditional doctrinal pedagogy and take the form of a pedagogical vision that is informed by normative values of human dignity, participatory justice, and civic engagement. Clinical legal programs, most notably those hosted within university law schools can serve as important mechanism to bring

⁵³ Richard J Wilson, 'Clinical Legal Education in Africa' in Richard J Wilson (ed), *The Global Evolution of Clinical Legal Education: More than a Method* (Cambridge University Press 2017) ch 8, 205-232. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139198370.011>

⁵⁴ Vinayaka Missions Law School, *The Lack of Clinical Legal Education in India and its Implications* (23 June 2025). <https://vmls.edu.in/blogs/lack-of-clinical-legal-education-in-india.html>

⁵⁵ Odinakaonye Lagi, *NULAI Nigeria 2022 Annual Report* (Network of University Legal Aid Institutions 2022). Available at <https://nulai.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/NULAI-NIGERIA-2022-ANNUAL-REPORT.pdf>

about these values through provision of real-time interaction with systemic injustice-affected communities.

Universities, in this respect, are stimulating with ensuring their curricula and outreach programs concur with the overall aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mainly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Bringing clinical legal education into alignment with these international standards not only raises the normative function of legal education but also adds value to promoting social and economic rights in practice. By providing students with hands-on skills, a sense of ethical duty, and a solid human rights framework. The law schools can assist in the production not only of competent legal professionals, but socially aware advocates who are ready to confront institutional barriers and protect the rights of marginalised and vulnerable communities in both countries.

In addition, the experiential learning that accompanies legal clinics through legal assistance, public awareness, and rights-based interventions enables universities to get involved in concrete ways with emerging inclusive legal systems. This engagement is a democratization of views of justice that puts empathy, local knowledge and empowerment at the centre. Such a model can serve not only marginalised communities but also enrich the learning experience of the students in an integrative, transformative way.

Thus, the future of legal education in Nigeria and India needs to be based on a rights-oriented approach of access to justice as a human right, and clinical methods as the interface between academic education and social responsibility. In so doing, universities and other institutions have the potential to be catalysts not simply for maintaining human rights and guaranteeing social and economic justice but also for realising inclusive and equitable goals in the global SDG's agenda. This vision necessitates institutional ardour, policy change, and onward investment in the experiential education of the law with a focus on justice to all.

The transformative nexus of democracy, civic consciousness, and social integration is the role played by legal education in Nigeria and India. This

study has demonstrated how legal pedagogy, especially clinical legal education (CLE), can become a potent force of democratic renewal, based on the doctrinal legacy of the same. CLE is not only bridging legal theory and social reality but also brings about a rights-consciousness among communities and students.

The comparative analysis of the research has revealed that the two countries other than having shared colonial legal traditions and institutional susceptibility have both experienced unique CLE trajectories. The institutional model of integration of legal aid as a subject in the national law school curriculum and its strong system of public interest litigation is a useful institutional model. The NGO-driven, decentralized CLE framework with innovative civic-tech integration offered by Nigeria can provide alternative models that can expand grassroots legal empowerment.

However, the doctrinal review found persisting barriers of under-resourced institutions, rigid curriculum, rural-urban distance, and political opposition to civic engagement. Unless these institutional barriers are overcome by joint regulation, specific investment and inclusive innovation in pedagogy, the power of CLE can be diminished.

At the normative level, the research verifies that legal education prepares one not only for practice in the law but also to instil civic virtues, democratic values, and social justice affiliation. CLE has to be constitutionally formulated as a key democratic function of legal education. This aligns with international standards as stipulated by the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the global guidelines towards human rights education.⁵⁶

Lastly, Indian and Nigerian law schools are well-positioned to be laboratories of democratic citizenship. Properly designed, funded, and monitored, CLE can produce graduates who are not only skilled legal

⁵⁶ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Fourth Phase (2020–2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education* (United Nations 2020). Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/world-programme-human-rights-education/fourth-phase-2020-2024-world-programme-human-rights-education>

professionals but also engaged citizens who can contribute to participatory and inclusive governance. Democratization of legal education is, therefore, not just pedagogical; it is a constitutional and ethical imperative.

7. NORMATIVE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A normative and policy recommendations framework is required based on comparative analysis and challenges highlighted to reorient legal education in India and Nigeria as a tool for civic action and social inclusion. Recommendations emerge from constitutional obligations, international human rights norms, and emerging case law on education and democratic rights. First, both states must elevate CLE from an afterthought activity to an integral pedagogic standard. It will be best realized by the integration of CLE across the semesters of legal education in terms of formal, credit-bearing modules.⁵⁷ The Bar Council of India and the Nigerian Council of Legal Education as regulatory authorities of legal education need to modify accreditation schemes to include CLE outputs such as community legal aid, right awareness campaigns, and student engagement in access to justice programs.⁵⁸

Secondly, significant investments need to be made in the financial and infrastructural basis of legal educational institutions. The governments must set aside allocations under access to justice or legal empowerment schemes for CLE programs. International donors and philanthropic foundations can also help transnational agreements among law schools to share the best practices and resources.⁵⁹ CLE dedicated budgets must

⁵⁷ N R Madhava Menon, *Reflections on Legal and Judicial Education* (LexisNexis Butterworths 2009)

⁵⁸ Solomon Ekokoi, 'Nigeria (Regulation of Legal Education)' (9 January 2025) [restricted access], ch __, 267–270. Available at <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035302932.ch74>

⁵⁹ Open Society Foundations, *Making the Law Work for People: A Handbook on Legal Empowerment and Inclusive Innovation* (2021). <https://globalprotectioncluster.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/2021.making-the-law-work-for-people-osf.pdf>

incorporate travel, fieldwork, community outreach, and digital legal education technology provisions.⁶⁰

Third, faculty development is essential for infusing a civic orientation into legal education. Law teachers must be trained in experiential pedagogies and interdisciplinarity, bridging the gap between legal theory and democratic practice. Universitas must establish incentives for faculty participation in CLE, e.g., academic credit, promotion, or research grants. Pedagogical innovation should be encouraged, not stigmatized, in rigorous academic hierarchies.⁶¹

Fourth, the regulatory structure must be altered in a way that would place civic skills into a greater priority. This would mean reconfiguring law school evaluation metrics to quantify students' exposure to community-based legal practice, access to justice results, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Bar admission should include mandates for community service or CLE certificates as part of professional schooling.⁶² Assessment models from international bodies like the American Bar Association or the Council of Europe could inform such overhauls.⁶³

Fifth, CLE should and can be extended to rural and disadvantaged regions as a constitutional mandate. The legal aid clinics or alliances with surroundings-based community organizations must be set up by law schools. Electronic facilities such as mobile legal aid vans and legal

⁶⁰ N R Madhava Menon, *Reflections on Legal and Judicial Education* (LexisNexis Butterworths 2009)

⁶¹ Ernest Ojukwu, *Legal Education in Nigeria: A Chronicle of Reforms and Transformation under Tahir Mamman* (2013). Available at

https://www.academia.edu/40091144/LEGAL_EDUCATION_IN_NIGERIA_A_CHRONICLE_OF_REFORMS_AND_TRANSFORMATION_UNDER_TAHIR_MAMMAN

⁶² Arghya Sengupta and others, *Towards the Rule of Law: 25 Legal Reforms for India* (Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy 2014). https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Vidhi_Briefing_Book.pdf

⁶³ American Bar Association, *Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools 2023–2024* (Erin Winters ed, ABA 2023).

literature in the dialect can fill the access gap. Nigeria's mobile legal clinic experiment might be an easily replicable model for India.⁶⁴

Sixth, legal education must take on an intersectional and inclusive culture. CLE programs should be crafted to meet the needs of women, people with disabilities, indigenous communities, and linguistic minorities. Gender audits, disability guidelines, and positive action in legal clinics can be employed to ensure that legal empowerment extends to the most vulnerable in the justice system.⁶⁵ Environmental justice, caste discrimination, and refugee rights should be included in the CLE curriculum as cross-cutting issues.

Lastly, the democratic function of legal education needs to be constitutionally entrenched. India and Nigeria need to set national policy regarding civic legal education to ensure CLE as a method to attain Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 for peace, justice, and effective institutions.⁶⁶ CLE needs to be institutionally attached with legal empowerment strategies embarked upon by national human rights commissions, legal aid offices, and ministries of education. The strategy positions CLE not just as an academic necessity but as a constitutional imperative.

All these recommendations map a course towards incorporating democratic values and social inclusion into legal studies. They establish that law schools are professional schools but full-fledged players in democratic statecraft.

⁶⁴ Ayodeji Arimoro, 'Clinical Legal Education: Vision and Strategy for Start-up Clinics in Nigeria' (2019) 26(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 132. Available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3644584>

⁶⁵ Shreya Atrey, 'A Prioritarian Account of Gender Equality' in Rebecca J Cook (ed), *Frontiers of Gender Equality: Transnational Legal Perspectives* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2023). Available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4562429>

⁶⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'Goal 16: Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies' (2023). Available at <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/peace-justice-and-strong-institutions>