

Clinical legal education in the state university system of Sri Lanka: Challenges and insights

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Clinical Legal Education (CLE) integrates theoretical legal education with practical training through supervised client interactions to strengthen law students' readiness for professional practice. Despite global recognition of its value in fostering competencies such as reflective practice, ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and employability, CLE remains marginal in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this research is to examine the institutional barriers that have hindered the systematic integration of CLE into state university law curricula in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the research aims to identify existing curricular gaps, analyse the challenges that sustain them, and propose strategies informed by the South African model of clinical education. South Africa is selected as the comparative jurisdiction because they have incorporated CLE within their public university system, facing resource constraints similar to those in Sri Lanka. Their experience demonstrates how reflective practice, community engagement, and professional ethics can be integrated despite institutional limitations. The study adopts a qualitative method based on primary and secondary resources. A quantitative approach is reserved for future research, once the basic institutional map of CLE in Sri Lanka is available. It is discovered that institutional barriers such as limited supervision capacity and insufficient funding continue to obstruct CLE's institutionalisation. To address these challenges, it proposes building partnerships with the legal profession, adopting technology-assisted clinical education, and developing targeted resource-allocation strategies. The research concludes that adapting educational frameworks inspired by South Africa's successful practices offers a credible pathway for Sri Lankan universities to strengthen professional training and align graduates with contemporary legal and societal demands.

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