

Application of the Legal Clinic Method in Legal Education in Higher Education

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Abstract

Social justice and human rights (HR) are fundamental elements in a fair legal system. However, the realization of these principles in Indonesia still faces various challenges, such as the increasing number of human rights violations, discrimination against minority groups, and limited access to education and legal services. The legal education system, which remains largely theoretical, also contributes to the gap between conceptual understanding and the practical skills of law students in addressing social justice and human rights issues. The clinical legal education (CLE) method serves as an innovative approach in legal education by providing students with direct experience in handling real cases. Through legal clinics, students develop legal analysis, negotiation, and advocacy skills, as well as a heightened social awareness. However, the implementation of this method in Indonesia still encounters obstacles, such as limited resources, regulatory barriers, and a lack of institutional support. This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of legal clinics in enhancing students' understanding and awareness of social justice and human rights. Using a qualitative approach, this research evaluates the design, implementation, and impact of student participation in clinical legal programs. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of a more practical and socially oriented legal education policy. With more systematic support from universities, the government, and legal institutions, legal clinics can serve as a strategic instrument in shaping a generation of legal professionals who are not only competent but also deeply committed to upholding human rights principles.

Keywords: Human rights (hr), legal clinic, legal education, practical learning, social justice

INTRODUCTION

Social justice and human rights (HAM) are the main foundations in the formation of a just legal state. Social justice in this case emphasizes the importance of equality of opportunity and fair treatment for every individual, without discrimination based on social, economic or cultural factors. Meanwhile, human rights include fundamental rights that are inherent in every individual from birth and must be respected,

protected and fulfilled by the state. However, the realization of social justice and human rights in Indonesia still faces various challenges. Data from Komnas HAM in 2023 shows that cases of rights violations increased by 15% compared to the previous year, especially related to discrimination against minority groups and agrarian conflicts. In addition, structural poverty experienced by more than 26 million Indonesians (BPS, 2024) hampers access to education and health services, while various forms of violence against women are still a serious issue that has not been optimally addressed. This challenge is not just an individual problem, but also a systemic problem that requires a comprehensive and sustainable solution.

Unfortunately, the law enforcement system in Indonesia still faces various obstacles. Inconsistencies in regulations, limited public access to legal information and legal aid, as well as the suboptimal capacity of law enforcement officials are obstacles in protecting and fulfilling human rights. In facing this challenge, legal education plays an important role in forming prospective law enforcers who have integrity and are competent in fighting for social justice and human rights. Law students who will work as judges, prosecutors, advocates and policy makers have a moral and professional responsibility to understand, internalize and fight for the principles of social justice and human rights.

However, the legal education system in Indonesia is still dominated by theoretical and doctrinal approaches, so it does not provide practical experience that reflects social realities in society. Existing legal curricula place greater emphasis on generalizing articles and analysis of classic cases, while covering less contemporary issues such as climate justice, indigenous peoples' rights, or cybercrime. As a result,

law students tend to have less direct exposure to social justice and human rights issues and do not have adequate skills in handling complex and sensitive cases. Therefore, more innovative, interactive and applicable learning methods are needed so that the gap between theory and practice can be bridged.

The legal clinic method (clinical legal education) is an effective approach to overcoming this problem. Through this method, law students can be directly involved in handling real cases under the guidance of lecturers or experienced legal practitioners. The legal clinic applies the principles of experience-based learning, active learning and critical reflection. This program can take the form of a litigation clinic that provides legal assistance to poor people in criminal or civil cases, a non-litigation clinic that focuses on mediation and policy advocacy, or a research clinic that conducts research on relevant legal issues. By involvement in legal clinics, students not only understand the law theoretically, but also gain experience in applying the law in practice, interacting with clients and the public, and developing professional skills such as interviewing, negotiation, mediation, and litigation. In addition, this method increases students' awareness and concern for social justice and human rights because they deal directly with the impact of the law on vulnerable individuals and communities.

Compared to conventional legal learning methods, the legal clinic approach offers more relevant practical experience, improves professional skills, and strengthens awareness of social justice and human rights issues. Therefore, it is very important to conduct research on the effectiveness of legal clinics to provide empirical evidence regarding their impact in improving the quality of legal education and upholding social justice and human rights. If the gap between the ideal of social justice and the reality of law enforcement continues, human rights violations will become more widespread, public trust in the law will decline, and the ideals of a just and civilized

rule of law will become increasingly difficult to realize. Therefore, this research aims to examine the effectiveness of the legal clinic method in increasing law students' awareness and concern for social justice and human rights issues. Specifically, this research will analyze the design and implementation of the legal clinic program, the role of lecturers and clinic supervisors, as well as the impact of student participation in this program on their knowledge, attitudes and behavior.

This research uses qualitative research to measure the overall impact of legal clinics, as well as develop a legal clinic implementation model that is appropriate to the Indonesian context. It is hoped that the results of this research can contribute to the development of experience-based learning theory and provide concrete recommendations for the development of legal clinics in Indonesia. Theoretically, this research will enrich the study of legal science and legal education by providing a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of legal clinics. Practically, the results of this research can serve as a guide for legal clinic managers, lecturers and students in designing and running more effective legal clinic programs. From a policy perspective, the results of this research can be a basis for the government and higher education institutions to formulate policies that support the development of legal clinics throughout Indonesia. Thus, the legal clinic method can be a strategic instrument in forming a generation of law enforcers who not only have strong legal competence, but also have high social awareness and responsibility in fighting for justice and human rights in society.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis and thematic analysis to understand the effectiveness of the legal clinic method in legal education in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the implementation of legal

clinics and their impact on students in understanding and fighting for social justice and human rights (HAM). Content analysis was used to examine various legal documents, educational policies, annual reports of legal institutions, as well as academic literature related to experience-based legal education. This technique aims to identify key patterns, trends, and concepts related to the effectiveness of legal clinics, implementation challenges, and their contribution to improving the skills and social awareness of law students. This research also applies thematic analysis to organize data based on the main themes that emerge from the documents and literature studied. This process includes several main steps, namely data coding to group information into certain categories, identification of patterns and themes to find connections between theory and legal clinical practice, and interpretation of findings to understand how this method can bridge the gap between theory and practice in legal education. With a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis, this research is expected to provide more systematic and comprehensive insight into the effectiveness of legal clinics in forming prospective law enforcers who not only have academic competence, but also practical skills and high social awareness in fighting for justice and human rights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of legal clinics in Indonesian universities shows variations in implementation that reflect the specific needs of each institution. In addition to the models already mentioned, several universities are developing technology-based legal clinics, utilizing digital platforms to provide remote legal consultations or manage cases. This technology-based legal clinic allows students to practice handling real-world cases using software that resembles the systems used by professional law firms. There are also legal clinics that focus on environmental issues or the rights of

minority groups, reflecting a commitment to relevant social justice issues.

Legal clinics in Indonesia are strongly influenced by the local context. In areas with limited access to legal services, legal clinics are often the only hope for poor communities. Legal clinics in rural areas often focus more on legal counseling and assistance for people who are legally illiterate. In areas with strong customary law traditions, legal clinics can play a role in bridging the gap between formal law and customary law. This allows for synchronization between positive law and customary law in dispute resolution.

However, there are several challenges in implementing legal clinics. One of them is limited human resources, which are not only a matter of quantity but also quality. A lack of lecturers who have relevant practical experience may limit their ability to provide effective supervision. Additionally, colleges often have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified clinical staff due to issues with compensation and career prospects. Without adequate support and incentives, it is difficult for legal clinics to retain competent teaching staff and administrators.

The legal education curriculum in Indonesia often focuses too much on legal doctrine and does not provide enough opportunities for students to develop practical skills. This makes students less prepared to face the challenges of the world of work and hinders the comprehensive integration of legal clinics into the curriculum. As a result, law graduates often have difficulty adapting to the world of work which requires a combination of analytical and practical skills.

Although there are several regulations in favor of legal clinics, there is still ambiguity regarding the legal status of students providing legal assistance. Some students are hesitant to be directly involved in handling cases for fear of violating the law or going against the legal profession's code of ethics. This can raise legal concerns for

students and universities, and limit their ability to provide legal services effectively.

The effectiveness of legal clinics is often difficult to measure due to a lack of data and standardized evaluation methodologies. More in-depth research is needed to measure the impact of legal clinics on graduate quality, access to justice, and social change. Systematic evaluation is also important to understand the effectiveness of legal clinic teaching methods and how these approaches can continue to be improved.

Legal clinics not only train technical skills, but also develop soft skills that are very important for a lawyer, such as communication, negotiation, teamwork and leadership. These skills enable graduates to interact effectively with clients, colleagues and other parties involved in the legal process. By practicing in an environment that resembles real legal practice, students can improve their interpersonal skills which are very important in the world of law.

The legal clinic helps students develop a strong professional identity, grounded in ethical values, social responsibility, and a commitment to justice. The experience of interacting with vulnerable clients can shape students' character and inspire them to become dedicated lawyers. Students also learn how to deal with ethical dilemmas in legal practice and how to make decisions that are in line with moral principles and professionalism.

Legal clinics not only provide legal assistance to individuals, but can also contribute to systemic change. Through policy advocacy, legal clinics can encourage legal reform that is fairer and supports vulnerable communities. Additionally, legal clinics can raise people's awareness of their rights and empower them to fight for justice. In some cases, legal clinics may even work with human rights organizations and government agencies to create broader social change.

To increase the effectiveness of legal clinics, higher education institutions need to invest in the training and development of

faculty and clinic staff, providing them with opportunities to develop practical skills and knowledge of clinical teaching methods. An ongoing, practice-based training program would go a long way in improving the effectiveness of legal clinic teaching. The legal education curriculum also needs to be revised to place more emphasis on developing practical skills, such as legal writing, legal research, oral advocacy and negotiation. Legal clinics should be integrated into the curriculum as an integral part of the learning process. In this way, students can gain practical experience from an early age and be better prepared to face the world of work.

The government, universities, LBH, CSOs and legal practitioners need to work together to create an ecosystem that supports legal clinics. This includes providing financial, technical, and legal support, as well as creating a collaborative network that allows legal clinics to share resources and experiences. A strong ecosystem will ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the legal clinic.

Efforts need to be made to increase public awareness of the benefits of legal clinics and encourage them to utilize the services offered. This can be done through legal education campaigns, publications in the mass media, and collaboration with civil society organizations. By increasing public awareness, legal clinics can expand their reach and impact. With deeper analysis and more comprehensive recommendations, we can better understand the important role of legal clinics in higher education legal education and law enforcement in Indonesia, and identify steps that need to be taken to optimize their contribution.

CONCLUSION

The application of legal clinical methods in legal education at universities has proven effective in bridging the gap between theory and practice. This method provides a learning experience that is more applicable and relevant to the needs of the world of work and increases students'

understanding of social justice and human rights (HAM) issues. Through direct involvement in handling real cases, students gain essential professional skills, such as legal analysis, negotiation, advocacy, and communication with clients. Apart from that, legal clinics play a role in strengthening students' social awareness and forming the character of prospective law enforcers who are more empathetic and justice-oriented.

However, the implementation of legal clinics in Indonesia still faces a number of challenges, including limited human resources, regulatory obstacles, and lack of institutional support. Therefore, synergy is needed between universities, government, legal aid institutions and civil society organizations to strengthen the legal clinic ecosystem. Investment in practice-based curriculum development, lecturer training, and supporting facilities are also strategic steps to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the legal clinic program. With wider and systematic integration in the legal education system, legal clinics can become an important instrument in producing graduates who are not only academically competent, but also have a strong commitment to fighting for social justice and human rights in Indonesia.

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