

El Bufete Jurídico Gratuito: un escenario formativo para los estudiantes de la carrera de Derecho

The Free Legal Advice Centre: a learning environment for law students

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RESUMEN: El presente artículo analiza una intervención pedagógica para mitigar la incidencia de accidentes infantiles fomentando una cultura de prevención y autocuidado en los ámbitos escolar, doméstico y público. El estudio se fundamentó normativamente en la NOM-003-SEGOB-2011 y se estructuró metodológicamente en cinco fases: inicialización, planificación, ejecución, control y cierre. La muestra incluyó a 59 estudiantes de los grados 5to A y 6to B de la escuela primaria “Flores R. de Munguía” en Caborca, Sonora. Se implementaron metodologías activas, tales como el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos, la gamificación y el aprendizaje experiencial a través de simulacros y talleres de primeros auxilios.

Palabras clave: Prevención de riesgos; Educación primaria; Cultura de seguridad; Metodologías activas; Aprendizaje basado en proyectos

ABSTRACT: This article analyses an educational intervention designed to reduce the incidence of accidents among children by fostering a culture of prevention and self-care in school, home and public settings. The study was based on the NOM-003-SEGOB-2011 standard and was structured methodologically into five phases: initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring and closure. The sample comprised 59 pupils from Year 5A and Year 6B at the ‘Flores R. de Munguía’ primary school in Caborca, Sonora. Active methodologies were implemented, such as Project-Based Learning, gamification and experiential learning through drills and first-aid workshops.

Keywords: Risk prevention; Primary education; Safety culture; Active methodologies; Project-based learning

Introduction

The Free Legal Clinic serves as a vital training ground for law students, as it allows them to integrate the theory learned in the classroom with professional practice in the real world.

This enables the programs to offer free legal advice to low-income individuals, while also serving as a platform for learning and skill development for future law graduates.

This model contributes to students' ethical, professional, and social development, while expanding access to justice for vulnerable segments of the population.

In this regard, it is important to note that limited access to these types of educational and practical opportunities poses a significant challenge to student training, as they face difficulties in developing skills before entering the legal profession.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze how the Free Legal Clinic functions as a training environment that contributes to students' holistic development and the acquisition of legal skills.

Evidence shows that practical training is indispensable for consolidating theoretical knowledge and fostering social commitment; however, in many institutions, this experience is insufficient or nonexistent, which limits adequate professional preparation.

Community service in Mexican higher education represents one of the most important pillars of students' comprehensive education.

In the case of the Bachelor of Law program, this formative stage extends beyond the classroom to become an experiential learning process that integrates theoretical knowledge with legal practice and social responsibility.

However, the conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered institutional and academic dynamics, also affecting the development of social service and professional internships.

This research presents the results of the pedagogical and professional experience gained at the Free Legal Clinic at the Caborca Campus of the University of Sonora, Mexico—an academic space that, since January 2021, has been coordinated by the first author of this article—as well as how it has been strengthened and reinvented amid an adverse yet profoundly formative context.

The Free Legal Clinic represents a fundamental learning space for law students, as it allows them to integrate the theory learned in the classroom with real-world professional practice.

This enables the programs to offer free legal advice to low-income individuals and, at the same time, serves as a platform for learning and skill development for future law graduates.

This model contributes to the ethical, professional, and social development of students, while also expanding access to justice for vulnerable segments of the population.

In this regard, it is important to note that limited access to such spaces—which are both educational and practical—poses a significant challenge to students' education, as they face difficulties in developing competencies before entering the legal profession.

Hence, this article aims to analyze how the Free Legal Clinic functions as a training environment that contributes to students' comprehensive development and the acquisition of legal skills.

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Development

Student training must be comprehensive, incorporating both theoretical and practical aspects to complement their education. Therefore, their active participation in the Pro Bono Legal Clinic allows students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world cases and develop skills in research, client communication, drafting legal documents, and litigation.

This contributes to a comprehensive education that goes beyond the classroom and prepares more competent lawyers who are aware of their social responsibility. (Universidad Veracruzana, 2024)

Students can perform community service and professional internships within these law firms, which translates into learning in real-world contexts under professional supervision, thereby strengthening their academic and professional profiles. (Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Autonomous University of the State of Mexico, 2022)

The pedagogical process for law students is based on teaching methods that seek to optimize active and meaningful learning.

According to Espinoza (2009), strategies such as case studies, the analysis of legal rulings, and legal reasoning are employed, allowing students to understand legal institutions and apply norms to specific cases, while also developing research skills and sensitivity to social issues. This contributes to a well-rounded education that goes beyond memorization.

For his part, Flores (2021) emphasizes that legal education must combine theoretical knowledge with pedagogical techniques that foster argumentation, critical reflection, and the resolution of real legal problems.

The application of methods such as case studies, problem-based learning, and role-playing stimulates independent and critical thinking, preparing students to face legal and social challenges with an ethical and professional perspective.

Hence the importance of the university law clinic, as it constitutes a fundamental training space for law students, offering them the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom to real-world situations.

Through handling specific cases, students develop practical skills such as drafting legal documents, legal argumentation, and advising clients, which strengthens their capacity for critical analysis and problem-solving.

This practice allows learning to go beyond the memorization of rules, transforming it into a meaningful experience that prepares future professionals to face the challenges of the legal field with greater confidence and effectiveness.

In addition to its academic function, the university law clinic fosters ties between the educational institution and society by offering free or affordable legal services to vulnerable populations. This

work not only contributes to social welfare but also raises students' awareness of the justice and ethical responsibility involved in the professional practice of law.

In this way, the law clinic becomes a comprehensive tool that combines academic training, professional practice, and social commitment, fostering the development of lawyers with a more humane perspective and a commitment to the needs of their community.

Access to justice is a fundamental right, but many people with limited financial means lack adequate legal representation. In this context, the Free Legal Clinic serves as a bridge to overcome these economic barriers, providing free legal assistance while simultaneously strengthening the practical training of law students. (Bufete Jurídico Gratuito Social AC, 2025)

These spaces fulfill an important social function by contributing to justice and equity for vulnerable sectors, which is also an ethical commitment for future legal professionals. (University of Guanajuato Legal Clinic, n.d.)

Thus, learning becomes dynamic and contextualized, fostering analytical skills and reflective practice in real-world and socially complex contexts.

This perspective aligns with the view that legal education must be active, inclusive, and critical in order to train professionals who are skilled not only in technical knowledge but also in the ethical understanding and application of law in society.

The conceptualization of social service and professional internships as spaces for comprehensive legal training takes on true meaning when they translate into real-world experiences that test both the student's technical competencies and human capacities.

While theoretical foundations provide the necessary framework for understanding the social value of legal practice, it is in the day-to-day work—through direct interaction with clients, case management, and the resolution of real-world conflicts—that meaningful learning takes place.

In this sense, the theory of practical legal training is inevitably linked to the institutional reality in which it unfolds. Each university and each pro bono law firm represents a distinct environment, with its own contexts, resources, and challenges. Therefore, it is essential to understand that the implementation of social service or volunteer models cannot be uniform or rigid, but must adapt to the sociocultural and educational conditions of each university community.

The Caborca Campus of the University of Sonora has been no exception. The history of its Pro Bono Law Clinic serves as an example of how legal education theory can engage with practice through innovation, empathy, and institutional resilience.

In recent years, particularly in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, this academic space faced a series of challenges that tested the adaptability of faculty and students.

In light of these circumstances, theoretical learning about legal practice took on new meaning: it was no longer merely about teaching how to draft complaints or interpret the law, but about rebuilding a collaborative learning environment that would revive student participation and ensure assistance for clients seeking legal advice.

In this process, legal education transformed into a creative endeavor, involving both human and technical support, that sought to keep alive the social spirit that gives rise to university law clinics.

The experience described here stems precisely from that need to turn theory into action and to reinvent training mechanisms in times of uncertainty. What began as a strategy to sustain community service evolved into a genuine methodology of practical and solidarity-based teaching, grounded in voluntary social service.

Upon assuming the role of General Academic Coordinator of the Free Legal Clinic at the Caborca Campus in January 2021, in the midst of the post-pandemic adjustment phase, the main challenge was enormous: to revive a space that had historically served as a link between the university and the community, but which was facing student demotivation, a lack of practical experience, and the disconnection caused by the lockdown. The students, still accustomed to virtual education, showed little willingness to join the clinic. Many feared contact with clients or did not feel prepared to handle real cases.

Given this situation, it became necessary to rethink how social service could be carried out, seeking alternatives that, without compromising academic rigor, would allow us to continue offering free legal assistance to the region's most vulnerable population.

In light of the low participation in traditional social service programs, a strategy based on voluntary social service or legal volunteering was adopted. This approach allowed the law firm to

open its doors to first-semester students, who, although they did not yet possess advanced legal knowledge, demonstrated enthusiasm and a commitment to learning.

It was necessary to design a step-by-step teaching process, starting with the basics: how to greet a client, how to listen to their problem, how to fill out a court appearance form, or how to accompany a lawyer to court. Each step presented a pedagogical opportunity, a different way to introduce students to the practice of law and the human sensitivity required when serving the public.

The greatest challenge was not teaching the law, but teaching how to apply the law with empathy and professional ethics. The first lesson for the students was to understand that behind every case file there is a person with a real problem, and that their work—even as students—has a direct impact on that person's life.

The teaching process was structured around three complementary dimensions: technical training, procedural training, and ethical and social training. This methodology allowed the legal clinic to regain its vitality and once again become an active space for learning.

In August 2023, after securing a position as a Full-Time Research Professor of Law, I also assumed the directorship of the Caborca Campus Free Legal Clinic, a responsibility that marked a new phase of consolidation and formalization of the previous work. The challenge was to strengthen the institutional structure, ensure the continuity of the volunteer program, and establish mechanisms for collaboration with other public and private entities to expand the clinic's impact. The transition from academic staff member to director signified not only a change in position but also recognition of the collective effort of faculty, students, and administrative staff who kept the university's social mission alive.

Based on the research methods applied, it was found that the volunteer experience, born out of necessity, constitutes an effective strategy for strengthening students' practical training and, at the same time, for reaffirming the university's social commitment.

The teaching of law at the clinic is not limited to knowledge of laws or procedures; it is about training humanistic lawyers who are aware of their role as agents of social change.

The Free Legal Clinic fosters students' ethical commitment by addressing legal issues with respect, equity, and justice. Working with people in vulnerable situations sensitizes future

lawyers, who integrate values of social responsibility into their professional practice. (UNAM Legal Clinic, 2020)

This ethical training is key to building a more humane and accessible justice system, which helps reduce concerns within the legal system. (Fix-Fierro & López-Ayllón, 2021)

It is important to note that the voluntary social service initiative emerged as an innovative alternative in response to student demotivation and uncertainty, but it soon became a highly valuable educational tool.

It also made it possible to involve young people who were just beginning their university education and offer them the opportunity to learn through practice, human interaction, and everyday legal reality.

This means that all the actions implemented as an emergency response ultimately solidified into a teaching model based on empathy, observation, and collaboration.

According to the results of the interviews conducted, this approach restored the humanistic spirit of the law and reinforced the institution's commitment to bringing justice to those who need it most.

Likewise, this experience highlights the importance of the teacher as a guide, facilitator, and mentor in the educational process. Legal education is not limited to transmitting normative knowledge but involves shaping individuals who are sensitive to inequality, capable of understanding the social function of the law, and of practicing it ethically.

In this context, the professor becomes an agent of transformation who inspires students to connect their learning with the social reality of their environment. Teaching at the law firm not only contributes to professional preparation but also to the development of a more conscious and compassionate citizenry.

On the other hand, the Free Legal Clinic, as it has evolved within the Caborca Campus, has transformed from a traditional academic space into a comprehensive university outreach initiative.

It has succeeded in bringing together diverse generations of students, strengthening a sense of belonging, and reaffirming the University of Sonora's social commitment to the community. Every case handled is a manifestation of the bond between the university and society, a reflection

of how higher education can positively impact people's lives when it is oriented toward service and justice.

Ultimately, the lesson learned from this journey is clear: law must be taught and practiced with humanity. Legal education, when rooted in direct contact with reality, produces professionals who are more empathetic, aware, and committed to their surroundings.

The resilience shown by students and faculty in this process is proof that the deepest learning does not arise from comfort, but from challenge. Thus, the Free Legal Clinic at the Caborca Campus has not only trained lawyers, but also citizens who understand that practicing law implies, above all, serving others with dignity, respect, and a commitment to justice.

Conclusions

The experience at the Free Legal Advice Centre on the Caborca Campus has shown that a lawyer's training is not built solely on theory, but on an ongoing dialogue between academic knowledge and socially engaged practice.

This space has become a living laboratory of law, where every case, every client and every student represents an opportunity for ethical and professional learning.

Over the years, the challenges faced — from a lack of student participation to the institutional fallout from the pandemic — have highlighted that the teaching of law requires flexibility, creativity and a deep commitment to service.

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