

From Implicit to Impactful

Advancing Reflective Practice in Law Clinics



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Clinical Legal Education | Social Justice | Access to Justice | Reflective Practice

Why This Work



The Spark

My experience at StFX Adult Education programme prompted my inquiry. This presentation is extracted from my research - [Reflective Practice and Its Potential to Enhance Clinical Legal Education and Support Social Justice Work of Law Clinics in Nigeria: A Case Study](#)



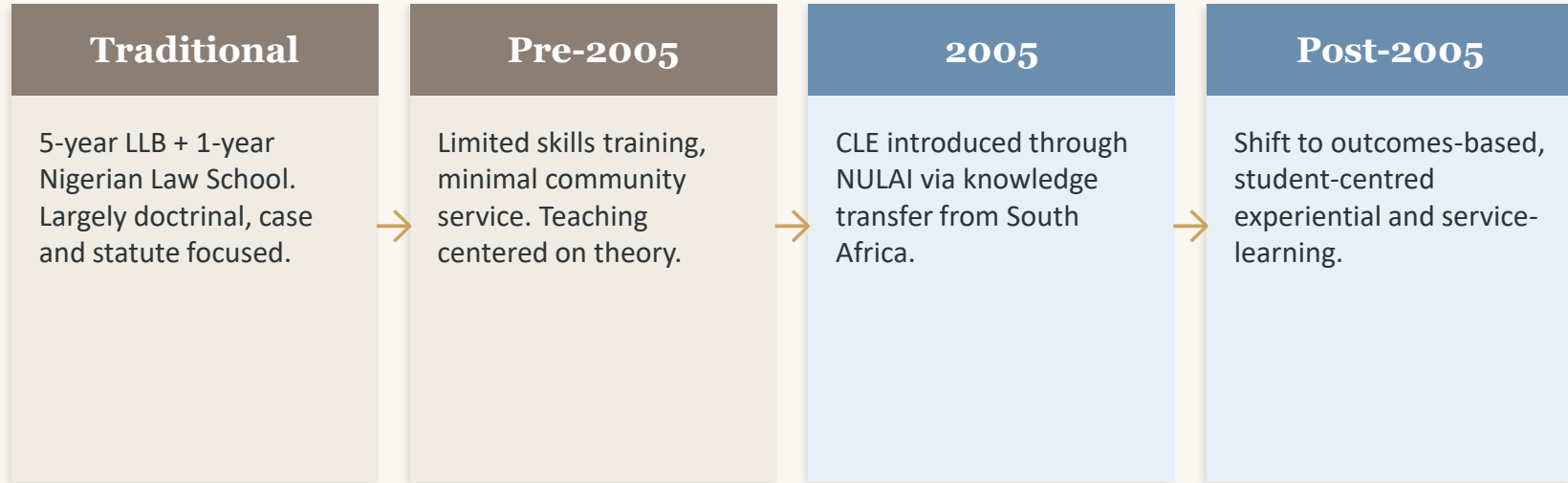
The Question

What could critical reflection do for students, teachers, and communities via law clinics?



Reflective practice is present in Nigerian law clinics — but often implicit. Making it explicit increases learning transfer and impact.

Nigerian Legal Education & CLE



Legal aid + community justice projects now central to Nigerian CLE

Conceptual Foundations



Experiential Learning

Learners make sense of experience and integrate outcomes into their biography (Jarvis)



Transformative Learning

Shifts taken-for-granted frames of reference; requires critical awareness of assumptions (Mezirow)



Critical Reflection

Principled thinking that questions assumptions; can produce personal and social transformation



Adult Education Lens

Learning is contextual — individual, collective, and relational

What Reflective Practice Means Here



- More than journaling — an intentional, constructive process embedded in teaching and clinic work
- Moves beyond cognitive/rational frames to include emotion, relationship, and context
- Links practice to theory; supports self-awareness, professional judgement, ethics, and praxis
- Goal: help students and teachers interrogate injustice and strengthen access-to-justice commitments

Gaps & Barriers

Why reflective practice remains underutilized in legal education



Inconsistent Terminology

Reflection, critical reflection, reflection-in/on-action used interchangeably



Educator Barriers

Unfamiliarity, workload, scepticism, “law as purely intellectual” mindset



Limited Operational Clarity

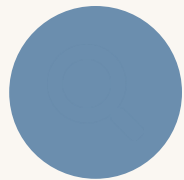
Unclear how to operationalise and assess reflective practice in legal education



Risks

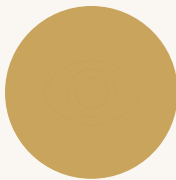
Emotional overload, tick-box reflection, assessment pitfalls, mental health strain

Research Approach



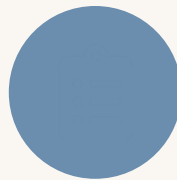
Paradigm

Qualitative case study within a
constructivist paradigm



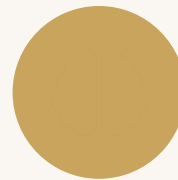
Focus

How clinical law teachers
describe and interpret reflective
practice



Data

Interviews with law teachers
supervising student legal
services



Analysis

Surface implicit reflective
processes, and clarify CLE +
social justice links

Core Finding

Reflection is integral but often implicit

“Clinical legal education is not possible... without reflective teaching.”



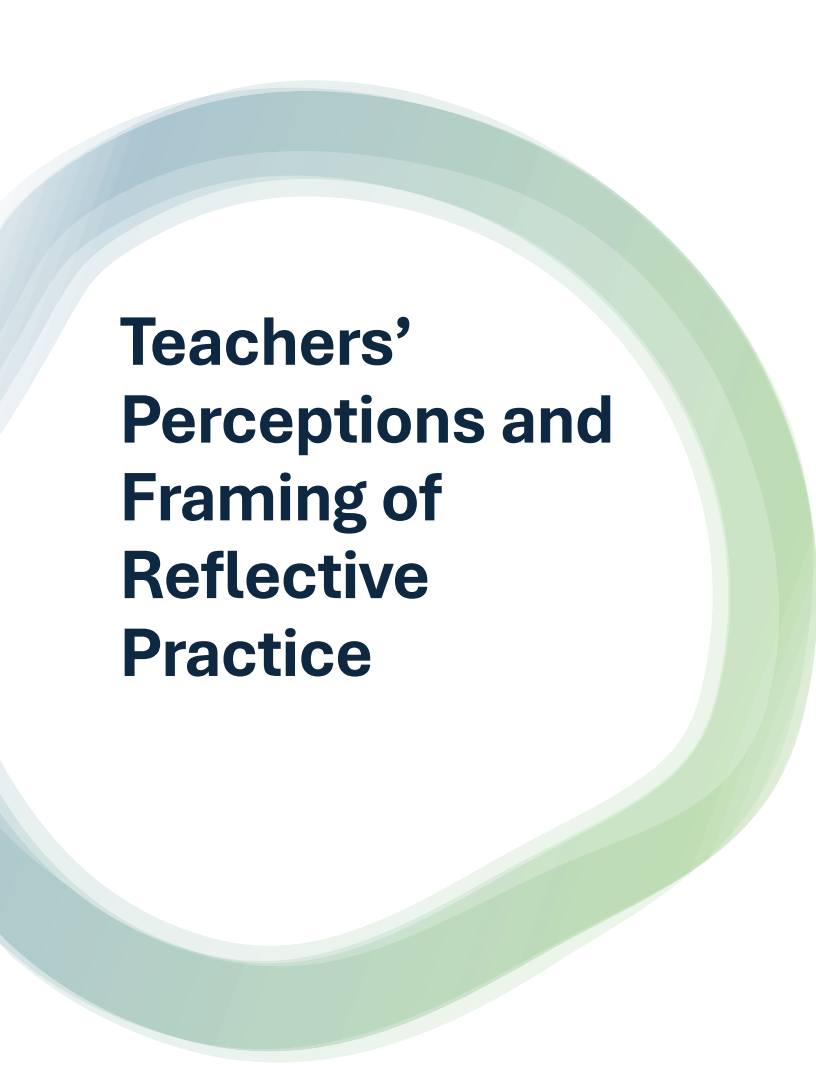
Reflection prevents CLE from reverting to purely theoretical, traditional approaches



Practices frequently unnamed and undocumented — limiting transferability and replication



Interviews helped participants name and frame what they were already doing



Teachers' Perceptions and Framing of Reflective Practice

“Reflective practice is an integral aspect of clinical teaching. What makes clinical teaching clinical is the fact that it has room for reflection. It enables both the teacher and the student to reflect on what they are doing at every turn or event and every lesson; after every lesson, after every activity, there’s usually a reflection that is either formally or informally designed.”
(p.75)

- Reflective practice entails an intentional constructive process in the teaching of law clinic practice, that creates an enabling environment for free expression for students’ learning and practice.
- It provides opportunities to interrogate systemic injustice, ask critical questions about the criminal justice system, identify a rationale for access to justice, and understand why public interest law is valuable and important..
- It provides opportunities to interrogate systemic injustice, ask critical questions about the criminal justice system, identify a rationale for access to justice, and understand why public interest law is valuable and important.
- Reflection is a process that helped to deal with issues and situations as they happened – rather than wait for later or let it linger, which would lose immediate relevance and learning of the experience.

Focus Themes of Research Findings

1

In-Class Reflection

Feedback tools to review learning and shape sessions

2

Out-of-Class Reflection

Embedded across clinic practice cycle and outreach

3

Emotions in Learning

Processing emotions triggered by clinic work

4

Practice to Theory

Teachers articulate theoretical framing of reflection

5

Assessing Impact

Evaluate outcomes for students, teachers, communities

What It Looks Like in Practice

In-Class

Regular feedback sessions (oral/written), inclusive discussion, teacher self-evaluation

Clinic Cycle

Briefing → Training → Execution → Supervision → Review/debrief
→ Post-project reflection

Community Feedback

Questionnaires + structured reflection sessions for planning future projects

Relational Foundation

Openness, equality, and free expression enable dialogue and deeper reflection



Emotions as a Lever for Transformation



Not a distraction — a catalyst



Tension: legal profession norms privilege objectivity and discourage emotional engagement



Clinic experiences (e.g., detention visits) create disorienting dilemmas and strong emotional responses



Reflection channels emotions into critical analysis of systems, ethics, and reform



Supervisors must prepare students psychologically and create safe spaces for emotion-informed learning

Impact & Recommendations

Impact

- Supports professional skills + social justice values
- Helps assess intended and unintended outcomes
- Strengthens democratic learning environments

Recommendations

- Make implicit explicit: articulate and document reflective processes
- Design for assessment from the start; avoid tick-box reflection
- Strengthen pedagogy: scaffolding, reflective inquiry cycles, educator workshops between the North/South

Conclusion

CLE enables expansive reflective practice that integrates critical reflection, reflection-in/on-action, and relational/emotional learning — therefore, moving practices from implicit to intentional will result in impactful pedagogy.

Teachers' Perceptions and Theoretical Framing of Reflective Practice



“Sometimes there is a gap between theory and practice which could be because there has not been an intentional pursuit of the theories behind a particular practice. The lack of pursuit should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or capacity; it could just be that it has not been presented as something that is needed, and therefore not considered to be important at that point in time.” (p.71)

Thank you



Interventions | Q/A

