



Reimagining Legal Education In India: A Swot-Based Policy Analysis Of National Law Universities

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Abstract

This paper presents a policy-oriented Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of National Law Universities (NLUs) in India to evaluate their role in advancing sustainable and inclusive legal education. Established to revolutionize the legal education landscape, NLUs have grown in number and stature but continue to grapple with issues related to curriculum stagnation, mono-disciplinarity, governance deficits, and inconsistent research output. While many possess world-class infrastructure and attract high-calibre students, their contribution to long-term educational sustainability remains uneven and limited.

This study critically engages with the frameworks governing NLUs, drawing on documentary analysis, institutional records, and stakeholder perspectives to assess their alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and the objectives of India's National Education Policy, 2020. It proposes key structural reforms in pedagogy, funding models, research integration, and institutional governance. The findings highlight the urgent need to democratize leadership, decentralize curriculum development, and ensure transparent grievance redressal mechanisms. The paper ultimately argues that reforming NLUs through sustainable, policy-driven innovation is essential not only for producing socially responsive legal professionals but also for strengthening India's justice delivery and democratic institutions.

Introduction

The study seeks to undertake a SWOT analysis of the NLUs in India, with a view to evaluating their current institutional performance and proposing reforms that can make legal education more inclusive, sustainable, and policy-responsive. In the backdrop of India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and the transformative aspirations set forth under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it becomes imperative to assess how well NLUs are fulfilling their mandate of providing high-quality, interdisciplinary, and socially relevant legal education. This analysis is situated within the larger discourse of institutional governance, academic autonomy, access to justice, and educational equity in the context of public professional universities.

The journey of NLUs started with the establishment of the National Law School of India University, Bangalore (NLSIU) in the year 1987 (The National Law School of

India Act, 1986). After a decade, the National Law Institute University, Bhopal (NLIU) (The Rashtriya Vidhi Sansthan Vishwavidyalaya Adhiniyam, 1997) and the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR) (The National Academy of Legal Studies and Research Act, 1998) were established in the years 1997 and 1998 respectively, followed by the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata (WBNUJS) (The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences Act, 1999); the National Law University, Jodhpur (NLUJ) (The National Law University Jodhpur Act, 1999), the Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur (HNLU) (The Hidayatullah National University of Law Chhattisgarh Adhiniyam, 2003); the Gujarat National Law University, Gandhinagar (GNLU) (The Gujarat National Law University Act, 2003); the Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow (RMLNLU) (The Doctor Ram Manohar Lohiya Rashtriya Vidhi Sansthan Uttar Pradesh Adhiniyam, 2005); the National University of Advanced Legal

Studies, Kochi (NUALS) (The National University of Advanced Legal Studies Act, 2005); the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala (RGNUL) (The Rajiv Gandhi National Law University Act, 2006); the Chanakya National Law University, Patna (CNLU) (The Chanakya National Law University Act, 2006); the National Law University, Delhi (NLUD) (The National Law University Delhi Act, 2008); the Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University, Visakhapatnam (DSNLU) (The Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University Act, 2008); the National Law University Odisha, Cuttack (NLUO) (The National Law University Orissa Act, 2008); the National Law University and Judicial Academy, Guwahati (NLUJA) (The National Law University and Judicial Academy Assam Act, 2009); the National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi (NUSRL) (The National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi Act, 2010); the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar National Law University, Sonapat (DBRANLU) (The Dr. B.R. Ambedkar National Law University Act, 2012); the Tamil Nadu National Law University, Trichy (TNNLU) (The Tamil Nadu National Law University Act, 2012); the Maharashtra National Law University, Mumbai (MNLUM) (The Maharashtra National Law University Act, 2014); the Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur (MNLUN) (The Maharashtra National Law University Act, 2014); the Maharashtra National Law University, Aurangabad (MNLUA) (The Madhya Pradesh Dharmashastra National Law University Act, 2018); the Dharmashastra National Law University, Jabalpur (DNLU) (The Madhya Pradesh Dharmashastra National Law University Act, 2018); the Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla (HPNLU) (The Himachal Pradesh National Law University Act, 2016); the National Law University Tripura, Agartala (NLUT) (The National Law University Tripura Act, 2022), the Rajendra Prasad National Law University, Prayagraj (RPNLU) (The Dr. Rajendra Prasad National Law University, Prayagraj Act, 2020); the National Law University, Meghalaya (NLUM) (The National Law University of Meghalaya Act, 2022); the Sikkim National Law University, Gangtok (SNLU) (The Sikkim National Law University Act, 2018). As on date, there are 28 NLUs in India.

The study analyses various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats surrounding NLUs by drawing upon their brochures, official websites, field-level observations, and qualitative inputs from faculty members, administrative staff, and students. It further develops a diagnostic understanding of the institutional structures and academic frameworks currently governing NLUs, and proposes evidence-backed suggestions for reform in the areas of curriculum, governance, financing, research productivity, and academic leadership. These proposals are directed towards ensuring that NLUs emerge as sustainable,

transparent, and forward-looking institutions within the Indian legal education ecosystem.

A review of literature reveals that NLUs are facing several problems in imparting legal education and undertaking cutting edge research. Though a considerable amount of literature exists with regard to legal education and research in India, none of the previous studies have undertaken a SWOT analysis to assess the policy, institutional, and pedagogical dynamics within NLUs (Google Scholar, 2021). Similarly, the articles on the topic are also silent as there is no such article published by any author that analyses the proposed topic of study (JSTOR, 2021). As such, this paper fills an important gap by offering a structured evaluative approach to both their institutional strengths and systemic failings.

This necessitates a comprehensive discourse on the subject, particularly in the light of mounting concerns about regulatory inefficiencies, infrastructural inconsistencies, pedagogical inertia, and widening access disparities. The present analysis aims to illuminate these concerns and place them within a broader reformative context- one that is aligned with national priorities of higher education transformation and global objectives for equitable and sustainable development.

Against the backdrop of the contextual and policy considerations discussed above, the following sections undertake a structured SWOT analysis of the NLUs in India. This framework has been adopted to critically assess both the internal institutional dynamics and the external challenges that impact the performance and future trajectory of NLUs. Each quadrant of the analysis identifies key themes supported by illustrative examples and is intended to inform broader policy recommendations for reforming legal education in India.

Strengths

Infrastructure

Most of the NLUs offer good infrastructure comprising of smart-classrooms, safe hostels with proper ventilation and safety features. Moreover, games, sports, fitness etc. are given due recognition, and suitable infra is available for the same e.g. gym, pitches, grounds etc. Emergency health facilities are also available at most of these institutes. They also have well-equipped libraries offering a good collection of both online and print materials. Some of the institutes have also provided remote access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous studies have noticed that these well-equipped and well-maintained libraries have played a key role in giving a boom to the legal education sector (Dhabhai, 2018).

Placements and Internships

Existing literature suggests (Shiksha, 2021) that NLUs, generally by and large have been able to place students at packages ranging from 4 lakh per annum to 15 lakh per annum at various legal establishments (Shiksha, 2021). The strong alumni base that these institutes have, plays a key role in securing good placements and internships coordinating with various student run committees (National Law University Odisha, n.d.).

Administrative Autonomy

One of the distinctive features and major strengths of NLUs is the administrative autonomy bestowed to them in matters like carving their own academic strategies, deciding upon the pedagogy, recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff, making policies to manage their own affairs, revision of curriculum etc. Additionally the 'University' status given to them adds value to their degree. NLUs function under the chancellorship of Chief Justice of India or Chief Justice of respective High Courts, in some cases, the Chief Minister or the Governor (Consortium of NLUs, n.d.).

Finances and Scholarships

Since all NLUs are state established institutes (University Grants Commission, n.d.), they charge lower fee compared to private ones (KIIT University, 2020). Also, state governments like Madhya Pradesh provide a full fee waiver if a candidate from MP, secures requisite percentage in class 12 and bags a seat at any of the NLUs. Similar scholarships are provided by organizations like IDIA and CAN Foundation and also by some of the NLUs like NLSIU (National Law School of India University Bengaluru, n.d.), NLUO (The National Law University Odisha, 2019) at their respective levels. These scholarships help in making quality legal education affordable to all quarters of the society.

Extra-Curricular Activities

NLUs provide an academically competitive environment and also value and encourage participation in extra-curricular activities like Moot court Competitions, Model United Nations, Round Table Conferences, Parliamentary Debates, etc. and also conduct many of these in their campuses, which give their students a definitive edge over students from other institutes. These events are largely handled by student-run committees which helps students gain hands-on-experience in organising such events.

The various guest lectures, conferences, seminars etc. help students interact with experts in several fields, as well as with students from different institutions; their horizons are widened in learn a lot in the process. The interaction with various experts widens the students' horizon in the respective fields and equips them to face challenges.

Coordination Between Bar, Bench & Academia

NLUs function under three councils called general council, executive council and academic council comprising of members from the bar, bench and academia (The National Law Institute University Bhopal, n.d.). This helps NLUs formulate and offer legal education based upon advices of experts in all relevant fields. In a few instances, students at NLUs have represented their grievances before these councils and have got appropriate relief (Shrivastava, 2018).

Diversity

Though NLUs reserve 50% seats for domiciled students, the other 50% of the seats are offered to students from all across the country. Since students are from the entire nation, it helps people from different states with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to add their perspectives not only to legal education, but also to various cultural events and festivals thereby providing a richer overall experience of legal education. This also makes them more broad-minded and helps everyone on the campus to nurture and enjoy the diversity in India.

Quality of Students

Common Law Admission Test (CLAT), the eligibility test for all NLUs except NLUO (Consortium of National Law Universities, n.d.), is one of the most difficult exams to be cracked in India (India Today, 2017); so, students coming to NLUs are considered to be among the best of minds in the country. These bright minds help building market reputes of the concerned institute by faring well in curricular and extra-curricular activities at both, national and international levels. (Badkur, 2020)

International Connections

NLUs have been able to enter into various Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with foreign universities for student/faculty exchange, which provides them an opportunity to think globally. NLSIU, NALSAR, NLIU, WBNUJS, NLUJ, GNLU, MNLUM, NLUO, DSNLU, RMLNLU, RGNUL, CNLU, NLUO and NUALS have all entered into MoUs with foreign universities.

Subject Specific Chairs

Various ministries, under a number of schemes for education and public outreach, have established subject specific chairs for promotion and development of education under their respective domains. These chairs facilitate better exposure to the students and top-notch research opportunities to the university. NLSIU (National Law School of India University Bengaluru, n.d.), NALSAR (NALSAR University of Law Hyderabad, n.d.), NLUJ (National Law University Jodhpur, n.d.), NLIU, (The National Law Institute University Bhopal, n.d.), WBNUJS, (The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, n.d.), NLUO, (National Law University Delhi, n.d.) MNLUM

(Maharashtra National Law University Mumbai, n.d.) house chairs in different disciplines. Apart from this, NLUs, have themselves constituted various chairs and committees to provide *pro bono* legal assistance; Project 39A of NLUD being an example.

A New Impetus to Legal Education

NLUs have heralded a new era in legal education making it very desirable. The process of liberalization, privatization and globalization created a demand for new type of lawyers and judges which the NLUs established were tailor-made to supply, adding to their prestige and importance. The last decade of 20th century witnessed fundamental changes in politics, economics, society and technology. These factors influenced legal education and research.

The faculty at these institutes are from NLUs as well as traditional institutions, which exposes students to different methods of teaching and learning. Many teachers stay in campus and are very approachable. They make time to personally interact with students and take up activities other than regular academic ones. Also, NLUs focus on aspects like research and writing; both of which are integral to the legal profession. All the students are required to submit original projects every semester, which infuses a creative element into their academic activities.

Weaknesses

Failure to Integrate Law Courses

NLUs have by and large failed to integrate other disciplines like humanities, science, commerce, management with law as these subjects are unfortunately not taught from the legal dimension and perspective. They are taught like regular courses, without bringing into focus the legal dimensions inherent in them. Though the courses are called 'integrated courses' they have remained independent in terms of both, content and method. It is pertinent to mention here that an integrated socio-legal approach equips law students to perceive the underlying social, political and economic issues that they're trying to address and improve through their legal education (Johnstone, 1992). Websites of NLUs reveal that most of the faculty tasked with teaching social sciences do not hold a law degree; which is one of the factors why students have not been able to develop an integrated outlook of the subjects.

Un-updated Curriculum

Another weakness of NLUs is the archaic curriculum that still remains in force. It may be mentioned here that the unstructured curriculum was one of the various reasons that led to the establishment of NLUs, (NALSAR University of Law, 2018) but these too have failed to revamp the curriculum. Periodical revision of

curriculum does not happen with the desired frequency at many NLUs. Though governing bodies of NLUs comprise of members of the bar, bench and academia, very few universities invite these members to undertake this task. The bodies of NLUs which frame and revise the curricula do not include the required expertise from all quarters (NALSAR University of Law, 2018). So, the curriculum revision process continues on the old beaten track without inclusion of new ideas, subjects and concepts. This makes even the revised curricula, out of sync with fast emerging social realities (Supreme Court of India, 1994).

Pedagogy

There is a need to relook at the pedagogy of law teaching to include the use of innovative and interactive methods and new patterns for examination to revive legal education in the country (Jena, 2002). Additionally, the rules of Bar Council of India (BCI) prohibiting practicing advocates to teach further precludes practical experience from coming to the classrooms; particularly with regard to procedural laws. Also, the semester wise inclusion and juxtaposition of subjects is illogical at times. For example, drafting is taught to students as a separate subject in the last years of the course. Instead of teaching drafting as a separate subject, it should be taught along with core subjects; to take an instance, teaching how to draft a will or a divorce petition, would make much better sense if they're taught along with family laws. Similarly, the civil pleadings portion of the Drafting Pleading and Conveyancing subject would go much better along the Code of Civil Procedure and the criminal pleading portion would go much better along with, the Code of Criminal Procedure and conveyancing part along with the Transfer of Property Act.

Diminishing Performance of Students

Attention may be drawn to the recent report of the Student Bar Association of the NLSIU, which highlights the diminishing academic performance of students year by year, on account of various reasons (Legally India, 2019). Apart from NLSIU, there have been similar instances, where performance of the students had been unsatisfactory for one reason or the other (Misra, 2003). Irrespective of the reasons behind, there is a need to tackle this worrying situation.

Poor Research Output

NLUs have been established to perform two main functions, namely imparting of education and bringing out cutting edge research. A plain reading of the objectives of the establishing Acts of NLUs depicts that almost every NLU aims to promote research, however, barring a few, not much has been contributed by these institutes in the field; neither by students nor the faculty; despite of the fact that research output being one of the most important criteria for ranking of law schools. (Ranjan, 2011) No journal published by the NLUs has

been able to get indexed with reputed platforms like Scopus, which itself testifies to the poor research culture that prevails at these institutes. There appear to be several reasons for this; like, lack of adequate incentives, lack of vibrant community of researchers in LL.M. and Ph.D. courses. The focus of the NLUs being mostly on the undergraduate courses, poor service conditions, failure to attract the best talents are the other reasons behind the dismal research scenario. (Ranjan, 2011)

Mono-subject University Pattern

Authorities have expressed concerns about the insular and isolated academic perspectives of mono-university pattern since they cannot offer the depth and breadth of vision that multidisciplinary universities accord. Though National Education Policy 2020 provides for conversion of mono-subject universities to multi-disciplinary universities in a phased manner, not all NLUs seem to be prepared for the same (Anand, 2021).

Trust Deficit

There exists a trust deficit between the students-administration, students- teachers and teachers-administration in NLUs. NLUs have witnessed at least six major protests in the past three years, revolving around the issues regarding the facilities and infrastructure being provided to the students as well as the response of the universities when those issues were brought to the notice of administration. In March 2019, RGNUL had suspended six students primarily on the grounds that they complained about the unhygienic and poor food being served in their mess. This suspension snowballed into a large-scale protest throughout the university. In the same month, some students in HPNLU fell ill due to food poisoning, which gave rise to protests across the campus demanding clean water and food. In July 2019, NLUO witnessed indefinite protest by the students against inadequate infrastructure and several other administrative issues in campus. In the same month, students of NLSIU agitated over the sharp increase of 27% in their yearly fees. In October 2021, the mess of CNLU was sealed as a snail was found in the served food. There have been a series of such incidents which highlight the trust deficit that exists between the students and administration of NLUs; this deficit also extends to teachers and administration of the NLUs on the one hand and between the students and teachers on the other one. More seriously there have been complaints *inter se* among the students, the teachers and the administration on issues like favoritism (Shrivastava, 2012), nepotism (Press Trust of India, 2019), casteism (Katheria, 2019) and discrimination (Ray, 2020).

Transparency

Some of the NLUs have not uploaded the updated documents under Section 4 (1) (b) of the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI Act) on their websites, while others have not uploaded any such document at

all. Websites of respective institutes reveal that NLSIU has made available, its balance sheets from 2003-04 to 2019-20 along with foreign contributions received in 2020.; NALSAR has uploaded its annual reports from 2016 till 2019, NLIU, its annual reports from 2008-09 to 2015-16; WBNUJS, its annual report from 2000-01 to 2017-18; NLUJ, its budget estimates for the year 2020-21; HNLU, its minutes of meetings of various committees and councils for the year 2019-20; GNLU, annual reports from 2015 to 2019; RMLNLU, budget from 2016-17 to 2019-20, along with other information under the RTI Act; RGNUL, its budget estimates till 2020-21 along with other information under the RTI Act; CNLU, annual reports from 2015-16 to 2019-20; NLUJ, annual reports from 2017 to 2019 along with other information under the RTI Act; NLUO, annual reports from 2015-16 to 2020-21, NUSRL, audit reports from 2010-11 to 2019-20, MNLUM, annual report for the year 2017-18, MNLUN, annual report from 2016 to 2018-19, HPNLU, annual reports from 2016-17 to 2018-19; NUALS, DSNLU, DBRANLU, TNNLU, MNLUA and DNLU provide no information on their websites while NLUJA has removed all the reports from the website(National Law University and Judicial Academy Assam, n.d.).

Lack of a Responsive and Effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism

It is pertinent to mention here that another major weakness of NLUs is lack of an effective grievance redressal mechanism for students. Though universities constitute disciplinary committees, and various councils to look into such matters, impartiality of these committees and councils comprising of internal faculty members and staff has time and again been questioned (Students of Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University, 2018). A member of academic council of one of the NLUs on the condition of confidentiality revealed that decisions of the council on student grievances are dictated by the Vice Chancellor, and the council must agree to it. The University Grants Commission (Grievance Redressal) Regulations, 2012 mandate on appointment of an ombudsman for effective grievance redressal at the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) including NLUs, however, only NALSAR has been able to appoint one till date (NALSAR University of Law, n.d.).

Failure to Appoint Review Commissions

NLUs have also failed in regularly appointing review commissions. The establishing legislations of all the Universities except NALSAR, NLUJ, NUALS, RGNUL, NLUJ, DSNLU, NLUJA, DBRANLU, TNNLU and HPNLU provide for appointment of such commission at least once in every five years, however, only NLSIU, WBNUJS and GNLU have constituted these, that too only once, since their establishment.

Opportunities

Granting Institute of National Importance (INI) Status to NLUs

It is suggested that INI status be granted to NLUs as it would regulate the political interference and proliferation of these institutes. It will lead to hiring of quality faculty as meagre funding leads to appointment of ad-hoc faculty and the talent is attracted to much higher paying private institutions. A private member Bill for the same is pending before the Rajya Sabha, however, the former Union Law Minister, said that there is no such proposal in place (Baral, 2019).

Renaming NLUs as Indian Institutes of Law

Changes in political dispensations are witnessing establishment of newer NLUs in many states contributing to their proliferation and diluting the standards. It is an unhealthy practice to name an NLU after a political leader and should be abandoned; instead all NLUs should be named on the lines of the IITs and IIMs as Indian Institutes of Law at a particular state or a city, as has also been suggested by the Rajya Sabha (Rajya Sabha, Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, 2016).

Incorporating a Statutory Body for Governance of NLUs

A statutory body should be constituted by the Centre to deal with matters such as guidelines for inclusion of institutions in the list of NLUs, effective grievance redressal mechanism, framing of question papers and so on. Its core members should be drawn from the Bar, Bench and Academia. The committee can have Vice Chancellors representing their respective NLUs. The committee should work democratically and oversee the governance of NLUs throughout the country. Appropriate framework may also be made for representation of students. Additionally, this body can be given the task of conducting an examination for appointment of teachers at NLUs on lines of CLAT to avoid political interference in appointments.

Reforming the CLAT

The scope of the CLAT examination should be expanded to include entry level test for Doctoral and Post-Doctoral courses too. This would be beneficial for both students and universities. Also, the responsibility of conducting CLAT can be given to National Testing Agency or a similar organization, as was also recommended by the experts in the first meeting for introducing CLAT (Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2006). Additionally, there is a need for giving it a statutory framework. Though establishment of CLAT Secretariat by Consortium of NLUs at Bangalore and its registration as a society under the Societies Act (Consortium of

National Law Universities, n.d.) is a step in the right direction, it still needs to be revamped and fine-tuned. As per the new Bye-laws, an NLU can join CLAT only upon evaluation and approval of the Consortium (Consortium of National Law Universities, n.d., Rule 15.2.2) and would continue to be a member till it voluntarily withdraws or is no longer eligible for membership (Consortium of National Law Universities, n.d., Rule 15.2.2). Further, it is also required to pay a hefty, non-refundable amount of INR 5 Lakh (Consortium of National Law Universities, n.d., Rule 15.6.1). Any profit motive is in clear contravention of the idea of the apex court behind introduction of CLAT. Though the authors agree that there is a need to oversee the functioning of all NLUs, it should be done by constituting a statutory body with appropriate checks and balances, comprising of core members from the Bar, Bench and Academia along with representatives of all the NLUs. This task is too important to be delegated to an association constituted only to conduct an entrance exam.

Further, the Executive Committee of the secretariat comprises of the 'top three' NLUs i.e., NLSIU, NALSAR and NLIU as its ex-officio members along with a four others (Bar & Bench, 2018). As per the memorandum of association of the Consortium, all income is to vest with this committee and it would also be empowered to control and administer property and funds of the consortium, which makes it a substantially powerful organ; most of the decisions are to be made by this committee by way of voting (Consortium of National Law Universities, n.d., Rule 7), however, independence and impartiality of the voters, in the opinion of authors, would be affected by the presence of heads of the three oldest NLUs in the committee of just seven members. Authors therefore opine that a democratic way should have been employed for the appointment of all the members of the aforesaid committee.

Doing Away with Memory Based Examinations

NLUs excessively emphasize on memory-based examination pattern. There have been calls, regularly made to revamp this system, but the same has not been done (Haq, 2018). The objective of law school exam should be to develop the reasoning abilities, abstract analysis, and creativity of mind, which, in the opinion of the authors cannot be achieved through the present system. A reference may be made to the examination pattern adopted by other institutes like IITs and IIMs for the same.

Assignment of Subjects to Teachers

It is a general practice across NLUs to randomly assign a subject to a faculty who doesn't have requisite knowledge and teaching experience over the same. As a result, students develop a disliking towards the subject

being taught. In order to avoid such situations, adequate care should be taken to allot subjects to teachers based on their specializations and to recruit teachers only for the subjects, which lack good faculty.

Sharing of Academic Resources Amongst NLUs

There exists a dearth of experienced and expert faculty in many NLUs. In order to tackle this, NLUs can enter into faculty exchange MoUs; which would provide an opportunity to students of some NLUs to learn from experts from others. This would not only benefit the younger NLUs, but will also increase cooperation, collaboration and networking amongst all the 'islands of excellence' for various academic and research endeavors.

Threats

Funding of NLUs

NLUs in India are established by respective state governments. Unlike other educational institutes, NLUs have been placed under the Law Ministry instead of Human Resource Development Ministry which is one of the many reasons why they are on second priority of the state governments in funding (Singh, 2019). Barring a few newer ones, NLUs receive nil or nominal funds from the state government, which acts as one major drawback for expansion and growth. Since these are 'State Universities' they get small plan grants from the University Grants Commission (UGC). It may be pertinent to mention here that on account of shortage of funds, the campus of NUSRL was reported by a local daily on the verge of attachment and the University on closure. (Saran, 2020)

Proliferation of NLUs

One of the most important recommendation of the Justice Ahmadi Committee was establishment of more NLUs on lines of the one at Bangalore. In pursuance of the same, 20 states have established 23 NLUs offering various courses. Andhra Pradesh was the first state to have two such institutes, followed by Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and the most recent one being Uttar Pradesh (Bose, 2021). There are various reasons for this proliferation; one of it being the 'self-finance model' which does not cast the responsibility upon the state government to regularly fund the institute. These new institutions are being operated without proper facilities on temporary campuses paying huge rents and in turn drawing the same through exorbitant fees.

Affordability

NLUs have not been able to provide affordable access to many aspirants because of the high fee they charge in comparison to other government institutes. For example, the oldest law college, Government Law College (GLC) Mumbai charges a minimal amount of 6890 as the annual fee for the first year of 5-year integrated course

(Government Law College, n.d.); whereas NLSIU charges 288855 for the same course (National Law School of India University, n.d.) which is nearly 40 times more compared to the former. Moreover, the state governments, instead of improving the existing NLUs, are engaged in opening new ones which will only result in dilution of quality of legal education.

Absence of required number of scholarships by the government further distances these institutes from the poor. Organizations like IDIA and CAN Foundation (CAN Foundation, n.d.) are providing financial support to undergraduate students at NLUs; similarly, in states, Madhya Pradesh is the only state that provides a 100% fee waiver for students getting admitted into undergraduate programmes in CLAT NLUs or NLUD after securing 70% in 12th Board Exams from state board and 80% in case of CBSE (Mukhya Mantri Medhavi Vidyarthi Yojana, n.d.). It may be noted that most of the NLUs make a hefty income of \$10 million per year by admitting students against the 'unconstitutional' NRI seats, (Shrivastava, 2018) but barring one or two, none of them provides scholarship for research-based LL.M. or Ph.D. courses. In August 2020, NLSIU had announced introduction of scholarship for Ph.D. courses, most other NLUs are yet to introduce the same on these lines (Kulkarni, 2020).

Domicile Reservations

All NLUs, except NLUJ have seats reserved for domiciled candidates, which ranges from 20% at NALSAR to 50% at most others. NLSIU and NLUD have recently joined the league by providing 25 (Careers 360, 2020) and 50% (Legally India, 2020) domicile reservations respectively. The process to reserve seats for domiciled candidates is decided by the establishing Act of the concerned University. For example, RMLNLU Act, 2005 grants the power to make reservations for various backward classes to the Executive Council (Doctor Ram Manohar Lohiya Rashtiya Vidhi Sansthan Adhiniyam, 2005, § 17), the NLUJA Act, 2009 empowers the University to make statutes, rules and other instruments with regard to reservations in terms of reservation policy of the State (National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam, Act, 2009, § 5(18)). The NLIU Act, 2018 grants the power to make reservations for residents of Madhya Pradesh to the Executive Council, but also fixes the percentage of domicile reservations at 50. (The Madhya Pradesh National Law Institute University Act, 2018, § 18) The DSNLU Act 2008 clearly demarcates the percentage of seats reserved for various categories; (The Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University (Amendment) Act, 2016) whereas the establishing Acts of NUALS, HNLU and RGNUL do not mention the admission or reservation policy. NLUs should be allowed to make reservations only to the constitutionally mandated extent and the rest of the seats should be made

available to candidates from all across the country irrespective of their domicile. This would certainly open the doors of these institutes to better students.

Multiple Regulatory and Accreditation Framework

The disharmony between the UGC and BCI with regard to affiliation of NLUs was revealed in reply to an RTI application of one of the authors. The BCI recognizes all Law Schools in India as per its regulations which are applicable to all institutes including NLUs; it has no authority to grant the status of NLU to a Law School (Bar Council of India, 2014). Though the BCI has nothing to do with the NLU status, it surprisingly says that DSNLU is not an NLU; (Bar Council of India, 2014) in spite of its being into the CLAT fold and the Madras High Court holding it to be one (R. Rajkumar v. Gujarat Educational Law University, 2014). Interestingly, the UGC in reply to another RTI says that the power to modify a Law University as an NLU and to lay down the criteria for such modification is solely up-to the concerned State Government. If all universities get the same recognition and it is also on record that BCI does not have the power to grant the NLU status, how can it decide which NLU is indeed an NLU and which is not?

Also, the one-year LL.M. programme, proposed to be scrapped by the BCI was first introduced by the UGC in 2013 based on the recommendations of an expert committee (University Grants Commission, 2012). The BCI, however, decided to scrap that initiative of the UGC without any recommendation of a committee or a group of experts who have studied the success or failure of the one-year LL.M. programme in detail over the last several years. No consultation or review was done even with the concerned universities even though these decisions are set to impact not only the students enrolled, but also those who already hold a one-year LL.M. degree.

Academic Leadership

Academic leadership is another threat being faced by the NLUs as the attrition rate of academic leaders is high. Recently, the Vice Chancellors of RGNUL and NLUO resigned to join SRM University and NLUJ respectively (Legally India, 2020). Similarly, the founding Vice Chancellor of MNLU appointed in March 2017, resigned in less than two years to join DSNLU. (Bar & Bench, 2018) The Vice Chancellor of NLUJA appointed in October 2014 resigned in June 2016 to join MNLU; (Srivastava, 2016) NLIU and HNLU have witnessed two and NLUO, three such attritions. The Vice Chancellor of HNLU joined the institute in 2010-2011 and migrated to RGNUL as the Vice Chancellor in February 2011 (Mittal, 2019). Also, the Vice Chancellor of WBNUJS appointed in 2014 resigned in 2018 amid students' protests. He was to join CNLU as its Vice Chancellor but couldn't do so on account of students' protest at CNLU against his

appointment. (Bar & Bench, 2018) Till date, the Bihar Government has not appointed a permanent Vice Chancellor for CNLU. It may be noted that generally, the term of Vice Chancellor at an NLU is five years, but DSNLU has seen a change of five Vice Chancellors in a period of four years from 2014 to 2018 (Srivastava, 2015).

Irregularities in Recognition of NLUs

Laws for the regulation of legal education in India are made by the Parliament with reference to entry 66, 67 & 78 of List I of Constitution of India, which incorporates two regulatory bodies: The BCI as a statutory body regulating the standards of the legal profession, and; the UGC as an umbrella organization for all institutions of higher education. All law schools in India, including NLUs are recognized by these two bodies. Out of these two, role of the former has been controversial. Teams of BCI members physically visit law colleges periodically to grant and renew recognition by assessing the capacity in terms of infrastructure, faculty strength, research output etc. However, more often than not, these inspections are neither robust nor extensive. The members visit the law colleges for a day and barely spend a couple of hours in actual inspection. Apart from the inefficiencies ingrained in the regulatory mechanism, there are also valid concerns about the integrity of the inspection process. Members of the BCI have been found guilty of corruption wherein they accepted bribes in order to grant recognition to law colleges (Nagarkoti, 2019). In this context, the Law Commission of India had also said that the inspection process needs to be revamped. It noted the complaints of some colleges, that they have complied with all the requirements needed for affiliation, but they are still not granted affiliation. Consequently, there are inspections every year and sometimes even more frequently, and each time the managements are asked to deposit a minimum of Rs. 50,000/- as inspection fee (Law Commission of India, 2002). There were also complaints that some inspections are cursory and colleges which are badly run are given a "clean chit" (Law Commission of India, 2002).

Attention may also be drawn to the arbitrary and unreasonable approach adopted by the CLAT committee particularly in the years 2012-2015, when it arbitrarily denied the inclusion of newly established NLUs for no valid reason, which did not only affect the reputation of the NLU, but also acted in detrimental interests of the students studying there. These NLUs had in-fact approached respective high courts seeking direction for CLAT inclusion. (Nikam & Madhu, 2006)

Conclusion

The SWOT analysis of National Law Universities in India reveals a legal education system standing at a critical crossroads. While NLUs have injected

professionalism, competitiveness, and international orientation into India's legal academic space, they risk becoming stagnant without urgent policy attention and structural reform. The study shows that weaknesses such as curriculum rigidity, lack of multidisciplinary integration, poor research culture, and governance opacity threaten their long-term viability. To align NLUs with the sustainable development framework, they must undergo a paradigm shift in orientation from elite, self-contained institutions to inclusive, policy-driven, and innovation-oriented hubs. Policy reforms must include periodic curricular reviews, robust grievance redressal systems, integration of technology and AI in teaching, and establishment of a central statutory body to oversee quality, equity, and access across all NLUs. In the context of SDG 4 and India's NEP 2020 goals, legal education should no longer be viewed merely as professional training but as a tool for fostering democratic citizenship and institutional justice. Reimagining NLUs as engines of sustainable legal thought and practice will not only strengthen India's legal education landscape but also contribute meaningfully to global conversations on equity, justice, and the rule of law.

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