Original Article ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

LEGAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IMPARTING QUALITY EDUCATION: A FUNDAMENTAL STEP TOWARDS ENSURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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DOI

10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.634

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development has become the need of the hour. Today the human race is facing issues ranging from environmental hazards, socio-economic disparity, etc. All such issues become a stone on the road towards ensuring the holistic development of an individual. Since the future of any nation resides in the hands of the youth, it becomes imperative that youth be appreciated not only of the issues, and their causes but also of the remedies for resolving such issues. Delivering quality education to the youth is perhaps one way to ensure sustainable development. Quality education makes an individual socially and morally responsible for his or her conduct in society. Institutions delivering legal education can play a role as catalysts towards ensuring sustainable development. Through their curriculum and other activities, they not only make young minds aware of the rights which include SDGs but also give them an opportunity to play a role towards ensuring achievement of such goals, like organizing conferences etc. on SDGs. However, in doing so, they have to face various barriers. Through this paper, the researchers would like to shed light on the role played by legal educational institutions towards imparting quality education with reference to achieving sustainable development goals by adopting doctrinal research using primary and secondary sources like policies, journals etc. The paper would further delve into the challenges being faced by such institutions in importing such education and possible remedies for resolving such issues.

Keywords: Legal Educational Institutions, Quality Education, Sustainable Development. And Sustainable Development Goals



1. INTRODUCTION

Legal educational institutions are integral to the development of a society grounded in justice and equality. They form the foundation upon which future legal professionals build their careers, and the quality of education they provide is directly correlated with the competence, ethics, and societal impact of these professionals. In the context of sustainable development, the role of these institutions extends beyond traditional legal training to include the promotion of social, economic, and environmental justice.

Sustainable development is a multifaceted concept encompassing economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Legal professionals play a crucial role in all three areas. They are instrumental in creating and enforcing laws that protect the environment, promote fair economic practices, and ensure social justice. Therefore, it is imperative that legal education imparts a deep understanding of these interconnected issues. To align legal education with sustainable development goals, institutions must integrate relevant principles into their curricula.

Quality legal education fosters critical thinking and ethical reasoning. These skills are essential for legal professionals to navigate complex legal and moral dilemmas. By incorporating case studies, moot courts, and ethical debates, institutions can prepare students to tackle real-world challenges effectively and ethically.¹

Encouraging a commitment to public service and social responsibility is crucial. Legal professionals must understand their role in promoting justice and equity within society. Programs like pro bono work, internships with NGOs, and community service projects can instill a sense of duty towards public welfare.

Legal educational institutions are vital in promoting sustainable development by ensuring the quality of education the institute provide. By integrating sustainable development principles, fostering critical and ethical thinking, and promoting social responsibility, these institutions prepare legal professionals to tackle the complexities of modern society. Their contribution to governance, justice, and the rule of law helps create a more just and equitable world, paving the way for sustainable development. As such, investing in quality legal education is not just an investment in the legal profession, but in the sustainable future of society as a whole.²

2. ROLE OF LEGAL EDUCATION

The role of legal education in society is multifaceted and crucial in shaping a just and orderly community. Legal education empowers individuals with the knowledge of their rights, responsibilities, and the workings of the legal system. This empowers citizens to make informed decisions, advocate for their rights, and participate effectively in the democratic process.

Legal education fosters an understanding of the rule of law, which is essential for a functioning society. It instills respect for legal institutions and processes, promoting compliance with laws and contributing to social stability. Legal education plays a vital role in promoting access to justice for all members of society. It equips individuals with the skills to navigate legal procedures, seek redress for grievances, and engage with legal professionals effectively.

Legal education imparts ethical values and professional standards to aspiring lawyers and legal professionals, emphasizing integrity, fairness, and the pursuit of justice. This helps maintain the integrity of the legal profession and ensures that legal practitioners uphold the highest ethical standards. Legal education nurtures a commitment to social justice and advocacy. It prepares future lawyers to champion the rights of marginalized communities, address systemic injustices, and work towards a more equitable society.

Legal education equips individuals to engage in governance, policy-making, and public service. It provides the necessary skills to analyze laws, propose reforms, and contribute to the development of sound legal and regulatory frameworks. Legal education includes training in conflict resolution and mediation, promoting peaceful and constructive resolution of disputes. This reduces the burden on the formal legal system and contributes to a more harmonious society.

Legal education fosters an understanding of diverse legal systems and cultural perspectives, promoting cross-cultural communication and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world. Legal education plays a pivotal role in nurturing informed, ethical, and empowered citizens, upholding the rule of law, and contributing to a just and equitable society. It serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance and social progress.

3. DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LEGAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Sustainable development is defined by the United Nations as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It encapsulates a holistic approach that

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¹ Chakraborty, S. K., & Krishna, T. (2022). Promises and Prospects of Legal Education in India in the Context of the New Education Policy: A Reality Check. Asian Journal of Legal Education, 9(1), 64-85. https://doi.org/10.1177/23220058211065983

² Nikolova, Bistra. (2021). Knowledge and Integrity in the Context of Sustainable Development. 6. 26-42. 10.11648/j.ijecs.20210601.15.

³ Soren, Chunuram. (2021). LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science. 8. 924-947.

⁴ Supra note at 3.

balances economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. When applied to legal educational institutions, sustainable development involves incorporating these principles into the legal curriculum, fostering a deep understanding of how legal frameworks can support sustainable practices. This integration is crucial as it equips future legal professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to address and navigate the complex intersections of law, society, and the environment.

The importance of sustainable development in legal education cannot be overstated. By embedding sustainability into the legal curriculum, institutions ensure that graduates are not only proficient in legal doctrines but are also sensitive to the broader impacts of legal decisions on society and the planet. This approach prepares lawyers to tackle contemporary global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequities. For instance, understanding environmental laws and policies enables lawyers to advocate for stronger regulations and corporate accountability, while knowledge of human rights laws empowers them to fight against social injustices and promote equity.

Moreover, legal professionals trained with a sustainable development perspective are better equipped to contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies that promote long-term societal benefits. They can influence legislation and regulatory frameworks to support sustainable practices across various sectors, including energy, agriculture, and urban development. This proactive legal advocacy is essential for driving systemic changes that align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁵

Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainable development within legal education promotes ethical reasoning and public service. It encourages future lawyers to engage in pro bono work and community service, addressing the legal needs of underserved populations and contributing to social justice. By fostering a sense of social responsibility, legal educational institutions help cultivate a legal profession committed to the common good.

The integration of sustainable development principles in legal educational institutions is a fundamental step towards ensuring a just, equitable, and sustainable future. It prepares legal professionals to not only excel in their careers but also to be leaders and advocates for positive change in society. This alignment with sustainable development goals enhances the role of the legal profession in promoting governance, accountability, and sustainable progress, making it an indispensable element of quality legal education.

4. THEORIES RELATED TO LEGAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1) Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning theory, developed by educational theorists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, posits that learners construct knowledge through experiences and reflections. In the context of legal education, this theory supports the idea that students learn best by engaging with real-world legal issues related to sustainable development. For example, through experiential learning opportunities such as internships, moot courts, and clinical legal education, students can develop a deeper understanding of how laws impact economic, social, and environmental sustainability. This hands-on approach not only enhances legal skills but also fosters a commitment to sustainable practices.

2) Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning, as proposed by David Kolb, emphasizes learning through experience, where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In legal education, this can involve simulations, case studies, and fieldwork related to sustainable development.⁶ By working on actual cases involving environmental law, human rights, or corporate social responsibility, students gain practical insights into the application of sustainable development principles within the legal framework. This model helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, preparing students for real-world legal challenges.

3) Interdisciplinary Approach

⁵ Mensah, J., & Ricart Casadevall, S. (2019). Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531

⁶ Kolb, David. (1984). Experiential Learning: Experience As the Source of Learning and Development.

An interdisciplinary approach to legal education integrates knowledge from various fields such as economics, environmental science, sociology, and political science. This model reflects the interconnected nature of sustainable development, which requires understanding and addressing issues across different domains. Legal education programs that adopt an interdisciplinary curriculum enable students to appreciate the multifaceted nature of legal problems and their broader societal implications. For example, courses on environmental law might include modules on ecological science and public policy, equipping students with a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

4) Systems Thinking

Systems thinking involves understanding complex systems by examining the interactions and relationships between their components. In the context of legal education, this model encourages students to view legal issues within the broader context of social, economic, and environmental systems. By adopting a systems perspective, future legal professionals can better understand the ripple effects of legal decisions and policies on sustainable development. This holistic approach is crucial for developing legal strategies that promote long-term sustainability.

5) Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory, advanced by Albert Bandura, emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and modeling. Legal education can leverage this theory by exposing students to role models who practice sustainable legal practices. This can include guest lectures, mentorship programs, and collaborative projects with professionals who are leaders in environmental law, human rights, or social justice. Through such interactions, students can learn about the practical challenges and ethical considerations of promoting sustainability in the legal field.

6) Ethical and Professional Responsibility

Theories of ethical and professional responsibility in legal education stress the importance of instilling a strong moral and ethical foundation in future lawyers. Sustainable development aligns with core legal ethics principles such as justice, fairness, and the public good. Legal education programs that emphasize ethical training encourage students to consider the long-term impacts of their work and to advocate for policies that support social and environmental justice. This focus on ethics prepares students to navigate complex moral dilemmas and to prioritize sustainability in their legal practice.

7) Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning, as articulated by Jack Mezirow, involves changing one's perspective through critical reflection and discourse. In legal education, transformative learning can be applied to encourage students to critically examine their assumptions about law and justice, and to embrace more inclusive and sustainable viewpoints. ⁹Courses and discussions that challenge traditional legal paradigms and promote sustainable development goals can lead to profound shifts in students' thinking, preparing them to become agents of change in their professional lives.

8) Critical Legal Studies

Critical Legal Studies is a movement that challenges traditional legal doctrines and aims to uncover the political and ideological underpinnings of the law. CLS advocates for a more equitable and just legal system by addressing power imbalances and promoting social justice. In the context of legal education, CLS encourages students to critically examine the role of law in perpetuating social inequalities and to explore how legal reforms can advance sustainable development goals. This theory promotes a critical perspective that is essential for understanding and addressing systemic issues related to sustainability.

9) Global Administrative Law

Global Administrative Law focuses on the rules and procedures governing global regulatory systems, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and participation. As legal education increasingly incorporates international and comparative perspectives, GAL provides a framework for understanding the global dimensions of law and governance. Teaching students about GAL principles helps them appreciate the complexities of international legal frameworks and

⁷ Annan-Diab, Fatima & Molinari, Carolina. (2017). Interdisciplinarity: Practical approach to advancing education for sustainability and for the Sustainable Development Goals. The International Journal of Management Education. 15. 10.1016/j.ijme.2017.03.006.

⁸ Xu, Jingwei & Li, Zhengmin & Li, Siyu. (2024). Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility in the Legal Profession. SHS Web of Conferences. 190. 02006. 10.1051/shsconf/202419002006.

⁹ Fleming, Ted. (2018). Mezirow and the Theory of Transformative Learning. 10.4018/978-1-5225-6086-9.

their role in promoting sustainable development. This theory underscores the importance of global cooperation and the legal mechanisms necessary to address transnational challenges such as climate change and human rights violations.

10) Ecological Jurisprudence

Ecological Jurisprudence is an emerging field that advocates for the legal recognition of the rights of nature and the intrinsic value of ecosystems. This theory calls for a paradigm shift in legal thinking, where environmental protection is not merely about regulating human activities but also about recognizing the legal rights of natural entities. Integrating ecological jurisprudence into legal education encourages students to rethink traditional legal concepts and to develop innovative legal approaches that promote ecological sustainability. It aligns legal education with the broader goals of preserving biodiversity and ensuring environmental justice.

11) Public Interest Law

Public Interest Law focuses on legal practices that aim to serve the public good, particularly by addressing the needs of marginalized and underserved populations. This theory emphasizes the role of lawyers in advancing social justice and promoting equitable access to legal resources. In legal education, public interest law encourages students to pursue careers and initiatives that contribute to sustainable development, such as environmental advocacy, human rights litigation, and community legal services. It fosters a commitment to using legal expertise for the benefit of society and the environment.

12) Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is an approach to justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior through inclusive and participatory processes. It contrasts with punitive legal systems by focusing on reconciliation, rehabilitation, and the restoration of relationships. In the context of sustainable development, restorative justice principles can be applied to address conflicts and harm in a manner that promotes social harmony and community resilience. Legal education that incorporates restorative justice teaches students alternative dispute resolution techniques that are aligned with sustainable and equitable outcomes.

13) Human Rights-Based Approach

The Human Rights-Based Approach integrates human rights principles into the development process, ensuring that all actions and policies are aligned with international human rights standards. In legal education, HRBA emphasizes the importance of protecting and promoting human rights as a cornerstone of sustainable development. This approach trains future lawyers to consider the human rights implications of their work and to advocate for legal frameworks that support social justice, equality, and the protection of vulnerable populations.

14) Legal Pluralism

Legal Pluralism acknowledges the coexistence of multiple legal systems within a single social field, including state law, customary law, religious law, and international law. Understanding legal pluralism is essential for addressing the diverse legal needs and perspectives within a society. In the context of sustainable development, legal pluralism encourages respect for indigenous and local legal traditions that often include sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. Legal education that embraces legal pluralism prepares students to navigate and integrate different legal systems in a way that promotes inclusivity and sustainability.

15) Transnational Legal Process

Transnational Legal Process theory examines how law is made and enforced across national borders through a dynamic process involving multiple actors, including states, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. This theory is crucial for understanding the global nature of many sustainable development challenges, such as climate change and human rights. Legal education that incorporates TLP prepares students to engage with international legal mechanisms and to advocate for policies that promote global sustainability.

16) Behavioral Law and Economics

Behavioral Law and Economics integrates insights from psychology into economic models of human behavior, challenging the assumption that individuals always act rationally. This theory is relevant to sustainable development as it can explain why people may not always make sustainable choices and how legal frameworks can be designed to encourage better decision-making. Legal education that includes this theory helps future lawyers understand the psychological factors influencing behavior and to craft laws and policies that promote sustainable and ethical behavior.

5. INCORPORATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES IN LEGAL CURRICULA UNDER NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to reimagine India's educational landscape, with a strong emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary education that prepares students to face global challenges, including sustainable development. For legal education, NEP 2020 promotes integrating sustainability into curricula through various strategies, emphasizing practical learning, interdisciplinary approaches, ethical responsibility, and global perspectives.¹⁰

6. STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

1) Interdisciplinary Approach:

Legal education under NEP 2020 encourages blending courses from environmental science, economics, sociology, and public policy to provide a well-rounded understanding of sustainable development. Joint projects and courses with other departments (e.g., environmental science, and business studies) foster a holistic perspective on sustainability.

2) Experiential Learning:

Legal clinics focusing on sustainability issues (environmental law clinics, human rights clinics) allow students to work on real cases, providing practical experience. Mandatory internships with NGOs, government bodies, or international organizations working on sustainable development issues offer hands-on learning.

3) Ethics and Professional Responsibility:

Including modules on sustainability, social justice, and corporate responsibility ensures that future lawyers are equipped to handle ethical dilemmas. Encouraging participation in pro bono work related to environmental justice, human rights, and economic equity instills a sense of social responsibility.

4) Research and Innovation:

Research Projects: Institutions are encouraged to undertake research projects on topics related to sustainable development, fostering innovation and practical solutions. Partnerships with government agencies, international organizations, and civil society for research and development of sustainable practices.

5) Global Perspectives:

Including studies on international treaties and global legal standards related to sustainable development. Opportunities for students to study in countries with advanced sustainability practices to gain global insights.

7. CHALLENGES

Rendering quality education is a primary duty of every educational institution. Getting good quality legal education still remains to be dream for many law aspirants. Educational Institutions redndering legal education are facing following challenges while providing quality education which needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

1) Lack of Financial Resources:

Implementation of SDGs requires funds, especially for providing SDG 4 i.e. quality education. However, most of the legal educational institutions face financial crunch. India spends less than 4% of its GDP on education. In order to enhance human capital, productivity, and economic progress, there is a dire need to prioritize spending on education. However, very few educational institutions are in a position to have sufficient funds to provide quality education. Lack of funds prevents such institutions from investing in technology-driven legal education i.e. providing e-library, conducting virtual workshops etc. lack of funds also gives rise to another challenge i.e. lack of infrastructural support.

2) Access and Equity:

¹⁰ Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education, available at https://www.education.gov.in/nep/multidisciplinary-holistic-education

¹¹ Gupta, B. (2023, June 13). *Analyzing achievability of SDG-4 in India – GNLU Journal of Law & Economics*. GNLU Journal of Law & Economics. Retrieved May 22, 2024, from https://gjle.in/2023/06/13/analyzing-achievability-of-sdg-4-in-india/

One of the most pressing challenges facing legal educational institutions is the issue of access and equity. ¹² In many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries and underserved communities, access to quality legal education remains a privilege afforded to a select few rather than a fundamental right accessible to all. ¹³ Economic barriers, limited infrastructure, and systemic inequalities perpetuate disparities in educational opportunities, depriving countless aspiring legal scholars of the chance to pursue their dreams.

Moreover, within legal educational institutions themselves, issues of diversity and inclusivity persist. Women, minorities, and individuals from marginalized backgrounds are often underrepresented in law schools and legal professions, reflecting broader patterns of inequality within society. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort to dismantle structural barriers, expand access to legal education for underrepresented groups, and create inclusive learning environments that embrace diversity in all its forms.

3) Curriculum Relevance:

Another challenge facing legal education is the imperative to adapt legal curricula to meet the evolving needs of society. ¹⁵ Traditional legal pedagogy, rooted in centuries-old doctrines and methodologies, often fails to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to address contemporary legal challenges. In an era marked by globalization, technological innovation, and rapidly changing social dynamics, legal educational institutions must reevaluate their curricula to ensure relevance and responsiveness to emerging legal issues. ¹⁶

This means that legal education has to shift away from rote memorization and towards an immersive, interdisciplinary approach. Through clinical programmes, externships, and experiential learning opportunities, students are able to interact directly with real-world legal issues and acquire insights and practical skills that go beyond the classroom setting. In addition, the incorporation of interdisciplinary ideas, ranging from data analytics to environmental science, enhances legal education by promoting a comprehensive comprehension of intricate legal matters and their wider societal consequences.

4) Interdisciplinary Approach:

The law deals with almost all aspects of life. Therefore, legal education cannot be studied in isolation. Legal education has to be studied together with other subjects/disciplines. It requires educational institutions to collaborate with experts across different field other than law as well like engineers, accountants, policy makes, scientists etc.. However, the not every educational institution is in a position to adopt such an interdisciplinary approach. They may find it difficult to have collaboration with personnels/experts from other discipline may be due to their reputation, or lack of funds or lack of willingness to adopt such an interdisciplinary approach. The lack of interdisciplinary approach by the institutions prevents students from having better and practical understanding of law. They may not be in a position to comprehend why a law was formulated and what challenges are being faced in implementation of such law.

5) Lack of skilled Personnel:

Quality education cannot be ensured without involvement of skilled personnel. Educational Institutions imparting legal education requires to have experts/ skilled personnel like one having knowledge about moot court, legal aid, practical working of court etc. In order to render a quality legal education there is need to have such skilled personnel. However, most of the educational institutions either face shortage of such skilled personnels or they owing to lack of funds are not able to hire such skilled personnel. Lack of availability of skilled personnel prevents educational institution from rendering quality education to the students.

¹² Joshi, K. M., & Ahir, K. V. (2019, November). Higher Education in India Issues related to access, equity, efficiency, quality and internationalization. Academia, 1-17.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ González, C. G. (2014, July). Women of Color in Legal Education Challenging the Presumption of Incompetence. The Federal Lawyer, 4, 2-12. http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4527.5842

Anand, P. (2014, March 17). Studying International Law Crucial In Indian Legal Education. Education Post. https://educationpost.in/news/education/in-depth-interview/studying-international-law-crucial-in-indian-legal-education

¹⁶ Akour, M., & Alenezi, M. (2022, November 4). Higher Education Future in the Era of Digital Transformation. Education Sciences, 12. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12110784

6) Absence of experiential learning supportive environment:

The experimental culture is almost nonexistent, except in cases where it is required, which is a huge downside to the entire notion. The majority of the country's law schools fall short in offering such an experimental, student-centered learning environment. because the administration lacks a clear vision for encouraging and modifying experiential learning. Administration of the Institution lacks clear vision for encouraging and adapting experimental learning. Further, the absence of drive and excitement for implementing experience-based learning, etc.. Regarding the legal area in particular, law students are not very motivated to engage in experimental learning, despite the fact that it is the most crucial approach to learn and practise the law.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

In modern context most of the educational institutions are facing difficulties in providing quality education owing to multiple factors like lack of funds, lack of vision or absence of quality focused environment. There is a need to create an atmosphere for ensuring that quality legal education is being rendered by the institutions like colleges and universities.

- 1) Providing training to teaching faculties: Trained faculties are required to ensure that quality education is being rendered by the institution. There is need to make it mandatory for every educational institution rendering legal education to provide training to its law faculties on matters relating to use of e-resources like manupatra, SCC online etc, moot court excercise, way of preperaing and deliverung lectures using technology etc. Such training shall be provided to the faculties on a regular basis so that there are in a position to keep up with the changes taking place in the industry. Further, such trained faculties will lead towards holistic development of students. It is imperative to note that a well-informed and knowledgeable teacher would help in producing great minds and polishing the development of bright students.
- 2) Developing financial and infrastructural support: Support in the form of infrastructure and finance plays a major role in allowing any educational institution to render quality education. Sufficient amount of funds allows an institution to equip itself with modern day educational methds of teaching and tools like e-librarry, mootcourt, virtual classroom etc. This not only helps in improving infrastructure of the institution but also allows students to comprehend laws that of being taught in a better way. Further, the adoption of experimentation-based teaching techniques like moot courts, and conferences requires fair amount of financial aid and well-established physical infrastructure like a moot court hall, auditorium, access to internet facilities, computers, and e-resources like SCC online etc. However, most of the institutions either suffer from a shortage of funds or lack in providing better infrastructural facilities. Therefore, the need of the hour is to provide and facilitate students with all such necessary infrastructure. The government and other institutions shall come forward and provide funds and other necessary support to such educational institutions for promoting experiential-based learning methodology.
- 3) Clarifying the objectives of the course being taught: Syllabus should be designed in such a way that not only provides the students with the knowledge about the objectives of the law course being taught. At the same time, it also becomes necessary that these objectives shall be clarified during the lessons being taught on regular basis. This allws students to understand why a particular topic is being taught. Having a clarity of the objectives behind the things being mentioned in the syllabus and the lessons taught in the classroom allows students to comprehend.