

UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN VIETNAM: FROM EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The quality of teaching and research, driven by faculty and researchers, is the cornerstone of success in today's competitive university environment. As universities face increasing challenges in attracting and retaining qualified personnel, the need for social responsibility towards employees becomes paramount. This study investigates the social responsibility of universities towards their employees in Vietnam, utilizing primary survey data collected through a custom-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire, informed by prior research and expert consultations, assesses eight attributes of social responsibility. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including descriptive statistics, the analysis demonstrates that these attributes are perceived as relatively high and statistically significant within Vietnamese universities. This study provides a valuable academic contribution by examining university social responsibility towards employees, drawing on both established research and original survey data within the Vietnamese context.*

• Keywords: *social responsibility, university social responsibility, employees, social responsibility accounting, economics, accounting.*

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1. Introduction

Social responsibility is a topic of increasing importance for researchers and leaders of businesses and organizations alike. Recent CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) research has expanded to encompass various types of entities, including those in the public sector, with universities being a prominent example (DeNisi et al., 2014). As a unique type of organization primarily focused on education and research, University Social Responsibility (USR) possesses distinct characteristics.

Within universities, the workforce comprises faculty, researchers directly involved in teaching and research, and support staff facilitating these activities. A university's responsibility toward its workforce is manifested in several key aspects:

Firstly, responsibility in developing faculty, researchers, and staff plans (including attraction, recruitment, appointment, allocation, contract termination, and retirement) aligned with the university's development direction and met needs in training, scientific research, and community service. Recruitment and selection criteria for faculty, researchers, and staff (including ethics and competence) are clearly defined and publicly disseminated.

Secondly, responsibility in managing work outcomes to motivate employees. This involves measuring and monitoring employee workload as a basis for improving the quality of training, scientific research, and community

service activities. Objective performance evaluations are crucial for accurately reflecting actual capabilities and informing fair compensation policies, such as salaries and bonuses.

Thirdly, responsibility in creating opportunities and favorable conditions for employees to develop their expertise and improve their skills. Universities identify needs, encourage employee participation in training courses, and actively seek and attract resources to support teaching, research, and community engagement.

However, USR remains a relatively new area of research. While UNESCO has recognized its importance in creating, preserving, and developing values (UNESCO, 2014), significant gaps persist in current USR research worldwide. Specifically, there is a lack of consistency in theoretical frameworks of USR, and frameworks for analyzing how universities implement USR principles (Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, this study offers significant theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature review

According to Wigmore-Álvarez et al. (2020), the fundamental difference between CSR and USR lies in the specialized training and knowledge development function of the university. This function generates results with impacts far exceeding those of businesses. Therefore, some researchers argue that USR should not be separated from a university's teaching and research activities (Parsons, 2014). Social responsibility has now become

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a defining characteristic of universities, manifested in their internal organization and external relations. Many researchers also assert that higher education institutions must adhere to social responsibility principles; this creates institutional identity and even contributes to the school's success and reputation (Kotecha, 2010).

In the modern world, concepts of social responsibility are being incorporated into curriculum design principles and higher education content, contributing to the education and training of future professionals by emphasizing the development of a strong sense of ethics, social values, and concern for the economic, social, and environmental impacts of business activities (Aznar Minguet et al., 2011). Within the context of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), teaching social responsibility in universities is an increasing trend (Setó-Pamies et al., 2011). Furthermore, prior research has shown that managerial commitment to CSR within corporations is primarily linked to qualities acquired (through education and training) from a student's experience at a higher education institution, rather than inherent physical characteristics (Quazi, 2003). Indeed, the critical role of education and awareness in achieving behavioral change has been argued as central to sustainable development processes (Tang et al., 2011), as universities educate and train future business leaders while also fostering the development of appropriate skills and attributes. Consequently, corporations interested in integrating social issues into their strategic business plans to achieve a competitive advantage will require graduates and managers with formal education, training, and ongoing professional development across a broad spectrum of sustainability issues (Quazi, 2003).

Various definitions of USR have been proposed, with Vallaeys' definition widely accepted in the academic community (Wigmore-Álvarez & Ruiz-Lozano, 2012): USR is the ethical implementation of social responsibility through responsible management of education, research, and the environment, with societal participation to promote sustainable human development.

3. Methodology

3.1. Scale and questionnaire design

This study employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Statements within each scale were adapted from previous research and expert opinions, with adjustments made to suit the context of Vietnamese universities. These adjustments were based on expert interviews and group discussions. The social responsibility of universities towards their employees is measured using eight observed variables (see Table 1).

3.2. Sample and data collection

The research sample was selected using a convenience sampling method. After designing the questionnaire,

we conducted online surveys using Google Docs, as well as in-person surveys. The survey link was shared via social media platforms like Zalo and Facebook, as well as through email. The target respondents included university council chairpersons, university council members, presidents, vice presidents, chief accountants, and accounting staff at universities in Vietnam.

This sampling strategy ensured a good representation of the education system. Out of 650 questionnaires collected, 64 were deemed invalid due to unreliable responses. These 64 responses were removed, leaving 586 questionnaires for analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

Quantitative research methods, supported by SPSS software, were used, and descriptive statistics were applied.

4. Findings

The survey results regarding the implementation of social responsibility by universities towards their employees are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Social responsibility of universities towards employees

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
USRE1: Develop faculty, researcher, and staff plans aligned with the university's development direction and meet the needs in training, scientific research, and community service activities.	586	2	5	3.27	.689
USRE2: Clearly define and publicly disseminate recruitment and selection criteria for faculty, researchers, and staff (including ethics and competence).	586	2	5	4.27	.770
USRE3: Ensure the recruitment and selection of faculty, researchers, and staff meet the regulated quality standards of qualifications.	586	2	5	4.20	.789
USRE4: Internal spending mechanisms, salary policies, and bonus regulations ensure equality, non-discrimination, and fairness.	586	3	5	4.42	.636
USRE5: The university has salary and bonus policies ensuring the living needs of employees are met, allowing them to focus on teaching, research, and work at the university.	586	2	5	3.51	.756
USRE6: The management and evaluation of employee performance is carried out objectively, ensuring accurate reflection of actual capabilities as a basis for compensation, such as salaries and bonuses.	586	2	5	3.52	.778
USRE7: Create opportunities and favorable conditions for employees to study, develop expertise, and improve qualifications and skills.	586	2	5	3.88	.401
USRE8: Recognize social responsibility initiatives of students and employees.	586	2	5	3.91	.442
Valid N (listwise)	586			3.87	.398

Source: Authors' compilation and SPSS SPSS20 Software

Table 1 shows that the average values corresponding to the social responsibility of universities towards their employees are above average, with an overall mean of Mean = 3.87 (less than 4)

Analysis also shows that human resources in any organization are considered a valuable resource and a core element for organizational change and development. For non-public universities, the faculty is seen as an even more important factor in affirming quality and attracting students. If non-public universities previously attracted faculty with salary schemes and dynamic working

environments, now, in the context of university autonomy, public universities have also made timely adjustments to working conditions to retain talent. The proportion of faculty with doctoral degrees tends to increase, while the proportion of master's and bachelor's degrees decreases.

Besides academic requirements, universities, especially private ones that are more application-oriented, also invite business lecturers who are successful entrepreneurs to participate in teaching from specialized topics to internship guidance. The criteria for business lecturers are flexible according to each school. Therefore, universities are concerned about defining and publicly disseminating the criteria for recruiting and selecting lecturers, researchers, and staff (including ethics and competence); and ensuring the quality standards for qualifications as prescribed in the recruitment and selection of lecturers, researchers, and staff (Mean = 4.27; Mean = 4.20). In addition to general standards, the recruitment criteria corresponding to each job position being recruited are defined more specifically by the schools. Many public universities develop Regulations on the Recruitment, Use, and Management of Civil Servants based on current legal regulations and implement recruitment in compliance with the civil servant recruitment process as prescribed. Therefore, the quality of the faculty at many public universities is high, ensuring the stability of the faculty and contributing to improving the quality of training at the university. However, the application of general regulations on recruitment and management of civil servants according to Decree 115/2020/ND-CP and some related legal documents is not really suitable for university lecturers, especially in attracting and recruiting lecturers, scientists, and good experts who are working abroad or working for the private sector to become lecturers at public higher education institutions.

However, the quality of lecturers is not really uniform, ensuring regulations at all universities in different localities. According to Dr. Tran Ai Cam (2023), due to the uneven quality of education at training institutions in Vietnam, with a clear difference between the leading group concentrated in major cities directly under the central government and the group of universities in the provinces, good lecturers are concentrated in major cities such as Hanoi, Da Nang, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh City. Universities in the provinces face difficulties in attracting high-quality lecturers to work. A fact that also needs to be discussed is that higher education institutions in localities that often do not recruit enough students or recruit enough but the student scale is not large enough will find every way to optimize costs over the priorities of ensuring quality. For example, educational institutions can reduce the number of full-time lecturers for specialized subjects and invite visiting lecturers for basic subjects. The shortage of lecturers is compensated for by "borrowing" the profiles of people who meet the teaching standards

but are working in other fields and not working directly at the educational institution.

Survey results also indicate that the development of planning for faculty, researchers, and staff suitable for the development orientation and meeting the needs of training, scientific research, and community service activities of the school has not been implemented evenly between schools. Therefore, the overall average assessment only reached Mean = 3.27.

Private universities are less influenced by regulations regarding salary and bonus systems for civil servants and employees. This allows them to be more proactive in developing and implementing salary and bonus policies that ensure employees' living needs are met, allowing them to focus on teaching, research, and working at the university (according to survey results, at private/non-public universities, the Mean = 3.78, while public universities only reached a Mean = 3.39). Furthermore, with higher compensation levels and a focus on work performance rather than formality, especially since the issuance of Circular 02/2022/TT-BGDĐT dated January 18, 2022, by the Ministry of Education and Training, the mechanism for signing 12-month professional contracts, regardless of whether the school is public or private, to qualify lecturers for opening new majors and student recruitment. Non-public schools have an easier time recruiting highly qualified lecturers from public sector units, with corresponding compensation. Young, capable lecturers will seek new challenges, leading to a transfer of high-quality labor (skilled lecturers and researchers) from public to private schools. Therefore, private universities often focus on managing and evaluating employee performance objectively, ensuring that it accurately reflects actual capabilities as a basis for paying remuneration such as salaries and bonuses to employees more than public universities (according to survey results, at private/non-public universities the Mean = 3.76, while public universities only reached a Mean = 3.41).

In today's modern world, universities are always competing with each other through the quality of training and scientific research. The decisive factor in the quality of training and scientific research is people - the university's faculty and researchers. Therefore, highly qualified human resources (faculty and researchers) have been considered an important asset determining the success of each school, but survey data shows that creating opportunities and favorable conditions for employees to study, develop professionally, and improve their skills is only rated at a modest level (Mean = 3.88) and is not consistent between schools. According to Assoc.Prof.Dr. Lam Nhan (2023), most faculty in cultural and artistic institutions in Ho Chi Minh City have weak foreign language skills. Therefore, links, cooperative exchanges of expertise domestically and internationally, are limited. It is also difficult for lecturers to independently study abroad in countries with higher levels of training. Employee initiatives on

social responsibility have not been adequately assessed and recognized (Mean = 3.91). Internal spending mechanisms, salary regulations, and reward regulations that ensure equality, non-discrimination based on gender, and fairness are assessed as being implemented relatively well, with an average value of Mean = 4.42.

6. Conclusion

Universities play a vital role in societal progress as centers for education, knowledge dissemination, and the cultivation of ethical and cultural values for students, who will contribute directly to the economic and cultural development of society. Research findings reveal that Vietnamese universities are increasingly aware of their social responsibility towards stakeholders, especially employees, as evidenced by the average values across key indicators. While differences exist in implementation levels, the overall average of 3.87 indicates a positive trend. However, this awareness is not comprehensive, particularly concerning social responsibility oriented towards sustainable development. Fulfilling university social responsibility requires not only commitment from the universities themselves but also collaboration among all stakeholders to achieve mutual benefits.

To strengthen the implementation of USR and promote sustainable development, the research team proposes the following recommendations:

Firstly, the Vietnamese government should enhance the development of guidelines and synchronize the legal framework concerning USR with all university stakeholders. This would establish a clear and specific legal corridor for universities to implement USR more effectively.

Secondly, raise awareness among higher education institutions and the community. Social responsibility is now a concern not only for the private sector but also for public service providers, including universities. As the economy develops and globalization intensifies, the social responsibility of universities is gaining importance. Universities need to recognize this issue and materialize it in their strategies and actions, allocating budgets and developing specific programs to fulfill their (voluntary) social responsibility commitments.

Thirdly, innovate university governance based on autonomy and accountability, proactively exploiting financial resources from the community while actively fulfilling responsibilities to students, the community, and partners. Increase accountability and transparency of information, especially communication with students, the community, and partners.

Fourthly, universities should identify and implement solutions to improve the quality of faculty and researchers, including:

- Implementing policies and measures to improve the expertise and research capacity of faculty, such as

- organizing in-depth training programs both domestically and internationally, short-term and long-term. Encourage graduate students and junior faculty to study abroad through scholarship programs.

- Developing and implementing talent retention policies, such as increasing salaries and bonuses based on work performance and research results; attracting high-level faculty and scientists from home and abroad (special contracts, flexibility); continuously improving working conditions: laboratories, academic resources, libraries, specialized software.

- Creating a favorable research environment by developing strong research groups, specialized laboratories, and interdisciplinary research centers; providing financial support for research: foundation-level research funds, national-level funds, corporate cooperation; simplifying administrative procedures in scientific and technological activities.

- Promoting international cooperation and industry linkages, connecting with businesses and employers to develop training programs and technology transfer.

- Innovating faculty evaluation and ranking through the development of a performance evaluation system based on competence and substantial contributions: scientific publications, inventions, graduate student guidance, and community contributions.

- Developing pedagogical capacity and innovative teaching methods through modern teaching method training, such as active learning, project-based learning, and blended learning; encouraging faculty to apply digital technology in teaching (AI, LMS, simulation software).

Fifthly, actively innovate training and research, integrating sustainable development-related modules, changing perceptions of sustainable business, increasing applied research, and actively and proactively linking regions and localities with universities in training, applied research, and deployment.

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