

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION: FUNCTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS



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Abstract. *The paper outlines the conceptual principles, features, and prospects for the development of social responsibility in higher education institutions. The main attention is focused on defining the content and functions of social responsibility in higher education in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ukraine. At the same time, important tasks are the formation of civic values, equal opportunities for all participants in the educational process and environmental awareness of students. The study is based on the analysis of international regulatory documentation in*



the field of education and the review of the results of theoretical and empirical works of foreign and domestic scientists. The use of methods of comparison, generalization and systematization allowed us to determine theoretical approaches and methodological guidelines for the development of social responsibility in higher education institutions. It was found that modern research lacks a unified concept of the formation of social responsibility in higher education. International practice confirms that effective social responsibility programs in higher education institutions combine an orientation towards the personal development of students, the formation of critical and independent thinking, and the education of civic responsibility in future professionals. Best global practices of social responsibility in higher education include environmental initiatives aimed at improving the energy efficiency of the educational process, promoting the use of environmentally friendly transport, and encouraging waste sorting among the population. Another important area is the formation of a culture of conscious consumption among students, which includes reducing resource use and reusing items. The development of volunteer programs for students and faculty that promote active citizenship is of great importance. Effective practice is the establishment of dialogue and partnership between higher education institutions and business within the framework of the implementation of social and educational grant programs. The main functions of social responsibility of higher education institutions include the creation of a safe and supportive educational environment, the development of civic awareness and activity, the support of inclusivity and equality, the promotion of sustainable development, as well as social partnership with the public. Ensuring security, psychological well-being and a culture of mutual respect in the conditions of national higher education becomes especially relevant during martial law. Cooperation among educational institutions, businesses, communities, and governments contributes to effective solutions to educational and social challenges. The study was conducted with financial support from the Institute of International Education Scholar's Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF). The research materials reflect the interim results of the VEGA 1/0316/22 research project Multidisciplinary Aspects of the Feminisation at the Department of Pedagogy of the Faculty of Philosophy at Comenius University in Bratislava.

Keywords: *higher education; social responsibility; social partnership; social justice and equality, functions of social responsibility; Sustainable Development Goals.*

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT

Education and professional training form the basis for the development of human potential and ensure the progress of society as a whole. In the context of digitalization, their role acquires special strategic significance, since it is through educational practices that a targeted influence can be exerted on shaping citizens' behavioural models for the public good.

The integration of the concept of sustainable development into the global socio-economic context has led to the transformation of ideas about the functions of public institutions and has updated the assessment of their activities through the lens of social responsibility. Rising educational level of the population contributes to the establishment of new moral and ethical guidelines and, at the same time, the preservation of traditional values. Awareness of social responsibility as an important result of human activity should be cultivated already at the stage of studying at schools and higher education institutions. Therefore, the implementation of the principles of social responsibility in the educational sphere is a key factor in the formation of mature, conscious and active citizenship.

The European Union's approach to corporate social responsibility provisions involves distinguishing of social economy entities. Research by Cone Communications (2016) enabled scientists to predict that in 2025, 75 % of specialists and employees of companies will be millennials. Issues of social responsibility and environmental sustainability are extremely important for this generation. The results presented in the study demonstrate that the vast majority (76%) of millennials surveyed take into account the social and environmental obligations of the company when making a decision about employment; 64% of millennials will not work for companies if they do not have a strong corporate social responsibility program (Cone Communications, 2016).

Social responsibility is relevant for higher education institutions, since universities perform not only an educational, but also a social mission. They form the values of future spe-

cialists and educate active citizens who are able to act on the principles of ethics and humanism. The content of social responsibility characterizes the educational process not only as the transfer of academic knowledge, but also as the formation of ethical principles, socially significant skills and an active civic position. The implementation of social responsibility contributes to strengthening trust between the educational institution, students, employers and local communities. In addition, it ensures the sustainable development of higher education through the implementation of innovations, environmental practices and social initiatives. Thus, universities' responsible attitude toward society enhances their authority and contributes to building a positive image in the global educational space.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, scientific developments on the issues of business social responsibility have intensified worldwide, and later in Ukraine. In the field of education, this issue is considered by Yatsenko (2021) who studies the theoretical and methodological principles of the formation of social responsibility of higher education institutions. Verbovska & Bodnar (2024) study social responsibility of higher education institutions in the context of harmonization of cooperation and sustainable development. Orzhel (2022) studies it in the context of the quality of higher education in the context of European integration.

Carroll (1991) proposed to interpret CSR as compliance with the legal, economic, ethical and discretionary expectations that society places on organizations and institutions at a certain time. The model proposed by the scientist covers four types of social responsibility of an organization: economic, ethical, legal and philanthropic (discretionary). We agree with the scientist that an organization or institution that practices CSR should strive to make a material profit, respect the laws of the country, act ethically, and also contribute to the formation of active citizens.

Thanasi-Boçe & Kurtishi-Kastrati (2022) analysed the characteristics of social responsibility among the university community. The authors aimed to determine the extent to which universities in developing countries have implemented social responsibility in Cahya, Baihaqi & Rohmah (2019) explore university social responsibility as a concept for a transformative breakthrough based on sustainable development. The authors argue that the university is an integral part of social life, as its influence extends to both direct and indirect spheres of activity. It fulfils its role through graduate training and initiatives such as volunteer programs and social responsibility projects.

The issue of university involvement in community life has been studied by a number of foreign scholars (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2020; Davari et al., 2018; Kouatli, 2019; Petersen & Kruss, 2021). These researchers emphasize the importance of university engagement with communities, requiring them to act as change agents in their local contexts. Petersen & Kruss emphasize that "the role of change agent presents new challenges for universities as it requires going beyond institutional borders to collaborate with non-traditional partners such as informal enterprises, and to stimulate and support innovation that may be seen as relevant to a given local setting only" (Petersen & Kruss, 2021, p. 1). We agree with the researchers that universities are now emerging as agents of change, and this requires expanding their activities beyond traditional institutional requirements. Cooperation with non-traditional partners and orientation to local needs of society necessitate the development of new approaches to the implementation of social responsibility. The problem lies in finding optimal mechanisms for combining global educational strategies with the development tasks of particular local communities.

A comparative analysis between the concepts of university social responsibility (SR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) was conducted by Almawi (2024) since universities are key institutions for promoting private sector business, creating social capital and supporting

innovation. Researchers Dzięgiel & Wojciechowska (2016) studied the activities of universities from three countries: the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The results of the study showed that the mentioned universities established a wide range of procedures for compliance with CSR. They took into account transparency, respect for the law, human rights, labour practices and organizational management. At the same time, they paid little attention to environmental issues and customer needs.

A team of scientists from international universities (Severino-González, Gallardo-Vázquez, Saldía-Barahona et al., 2024) analysed the issues of social responsibility of universities in the context of the formation of socially oriented specialists. Scientists concluded that the social responsibility of the university is considered as a flexible, dynamic and integrative management model that takes into account the needs, interests and expectations of all participants of the educational process. At the same time, such an understanding challenges the traditional functions of higher education institutions due to the multidimensionality of spheres of influence. The researchers paid special attention to the relationship between social responsibility and environmental education, emphasizing their potential in training future professionals. These factors cultivate in students the ability to show empathy, respect human dignity, freedom, develop civic responsibility, and foster a caring attitude toward the environment. In the future, this creates a foundation for shaping new principles and values that reflect the ideas of sustainable development and social responsibility.

In the paper “Examining the Research Evolution on the Socio-Economic and Environmental Dimensions on University Social Responsibility” scholars argued that social responsibility in the context of CSR should be understood as responsibility to the local community, it is “the institution’s obligation to develop initiatives that advance its relations with different social groups” (Meseguer-Sánchez et al., 2020).

A similar view of the understanding of social responsibility in higher education institutions is recorded in the definition proposed by the ESPRIT project “The social responsibility of higher education refers to the obligations of a higher education institution and its students to cooperate with the society in which they operate and to take certain actions to fulfil this obligation” (TEMPUS ESPRIT, 2016, p. 26).

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, many socio-economic changes and transformations have taken place in Ukraine. Thus, as of 2020, Ukraine had achieved progress on 15 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Priority is given to Goal 4 “Quality Education”, Goal 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth” and Goal 3 “Good Health and Well-being” (Medynska, 2023). Sustainable development in the 21st century has been identified by the United Nations as the main direction of civilizational progress. Ukraine is one of a number of states that have undertaken to introduce the principles of sustainable development into the system of socio-economic management. It is significant that the vast majority of Ukrainian enterprises, organizations and institutions support the values of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Okhrimenko & Ivanova, 2015).

It should be emphasized that CSR integrates the values of socially responsible activity into the strategy and mission of an enterprise, organization, or institution. This indicates that the values of social responsibility become an integral outcome of employees’ professional activities. Under martial law in Ukraine, the key areas for implementing social responsibility include creating jobs for people in difficult circumstances, restoring housing, and supporting the education and healthcare sectors.

A theoretical analysis of scientific sources revealed that modern research lacks a unified concept for the formation of social responsibility in education.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose and tasks of the article

According to the above, the purpose of the article is to define the conceptual foundations, trends, and prospects for the development of social responsibility in higher education institutions. Based on this goal, tasks are formulated to address the problems of defining the content and functions of social responsibility in higher education institutions within the context of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the country.

The methodological concept of the study includes the analysis of international regulatory documentation in the field of education to substantiate modern aspects of social responsibility of domestic higher education institutions, as well as the application of methods of comparison, generalization, and systematization to identify theoretical foundations and methodological guidelines.

MAIN RESULTS

At the beginning of the 21st century, increased attention has been paid to the impact of human activity on the environment, economic inequality, and global challenges, such as climate change. This has created the need to educate a new generation of citizens who not only possess professional skills but are also able to respond constructively to current social problems.

The guiding principles of social responsibility in higher education institutions are grounded in the concept proposed by the foreign researcher Elkington, who introduced the idea of Triple-P (People, Planet, Profit) into scientific discourse. Elkington's framework integrates three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. We argue that these fundamental components of social responsibility in education should be aligned with the 17 principles of sustainable development (ESD Strategy, 2005). The principles outlined in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development provide the foundation to ensure that state educational policies, existing regulatory and legal frameworks, and organizational conditions serve as the basis for promoting sustainable development in the educational sphere. In this context, social responsibility understood as a mechanism for regulating non-market relations between educational institutions and both internal and external organizations should directly influence their interactions. The provision of educational services is directed toward shaping and developing human and intellectual potential, which will ultimately determine an individual's competitiveness (Kratt & Dorovskykh, 2012).

The international standard ISO 26000:2010 defines social responsibility as the accountability of an organization for the impact of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, exercised through transparent and ethical behaviour that: contributes to sustainable development, public health, and societal well-being; takes into account the expectations of stakeholders; complies with applicable laws and is consistent with international norms of behaviour; aligns with the organization's development strategy; is integrated across all organizational activities; and is implemented in organizational practices (ISO, 2010). This standard serves as a benchmark for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of professional activities.

ISO 26000:2010 summarizes and identifies for consideration the following elements of social responsibility as: recognition of social responsibility; identification of stakeholders and engagement with them; organizational governance; accountability; transparency; ethical behaviour; respect for stakeholder interests; compliance with legal norms; adherence to international standards of behaviour; respect for and protection of human rights; labour practices; environmental responsibility; fair business practices; consumer issues; and community involvement and development (ISO, 2010).

It should be noted that the adoption of the international standard ISO 26000:2010 has significantly broadened the interpretation of social responsibility. The standard also highlights several key thematic areas: human rights, environmental sustainability, labour relations, consumer rights, fair business practices, as well as community participation and social development (Orzhel, 2022).

It should also be emphasized that, “despite the presence of common characteristics, throughout its history the Ukrainian education system has undergone significant changes, directly connected with the country’s political trajectory and the transformations occurring in the social, cultural, economic, and political spheres of society, which necessitated adjustments to educational policy” (Yatsenko, 2021, p. 26).

Studying successful educational practices in foreign countries can serve as an impetus to enhance motivation among Ukrainian institutions and educational establishments to actively address issues of social responsibility. Among the main factors contributing to the growing popularity of the phenomenon of “social responsibility in education” are the increasing role of civil society, the demands of the labour market for employees with well-developed social and moral qualities, and the necessity of responding to global environmental and social challenges.

As De la Cruz Ayuso (2017) observes, the approach to social responsibility in the educational sector is grounded in an understanding of justice within a global context and solidarity, while also stressing the inadequacy of reducing responsibility to mere obligation.

From the perspective of foreign scholars examining the legitimacy of universities, social responsibility is conceived as openness and accountability, practically expressed through the collection, processing, and dissemination of information regarding institutional significance, and by providing evidence of service to society, particular groups, and communities (Meyer & Sporn, 2018). Social responsibility in education is also closely tied to the concept of social impact, as emphasized in the work of Spanish researcher Vallaeys “Responsabilidad Social Universitaria: una nueva filosofía de gestión ética e inteligente para las universidades” (2008). The scholar identifies the social impact of education in the following dimensions:

- *organizational*: working conditions, environmental considerations, and everyday practices shaped in accordance with the values of the community in which the educational institution operates;
- *educational*: the design of educational processes and the development of curricula that shape graduates as citizens responsible for the advancement of the community, region, and country;
- *cognitive*: the epistemological orientation of scientific research, the processes of knowledge dissemination, and knowledge management in the educational sphere;
- *social*: the institution’s connections with external stakeholders and its involvement in the development of the local community, stemming from its social role as a promoter of sustainable social development (Vallaeys, 2008).

For instance, the social responsibility initiatives of London’s Global University focus on such components as: creating a sustainable campus and promoting the principles of sustainable development; environmental sustainability; active educational communication; the establishment of partnerships and cooperation with local and regional enterprises and institutions; and the implementation of social responsibility at both national and international levels.

This higher education institution has implemented a socially responsible investment policy. Thus, the university plans to spend funds annually on compliance with sustainable construction standards and on improving energy efficiency as part of environmental initiatives. (UCL, 2022). The experience of this higher education institution is particularly noteworthy.

Analysing the foreign experience of social responsibility in higher education institutions, it can be argued that for leading European universities, CSR is perceived as a form of educa-

tional service. Within the framework of CSR implementation, university representatives assist individuals in understanding social norms of behaviour, orient them toward social goals and values as personally significant, and foster the adoption of behaviour consistent with societal norms of life.

A comparative analysis of scientific sources, analytical reports, and materials from the websites of various Ukrainian higher education institutions made it possible to identify the most common CSR practices in the educational sphere:

- environmental initiatives within local communities, including compliance with energy efficiency standards, the introduction of ecological transport, and waste sorting (e.g., student-led meetings on garbage and waste collection);
- initiatives aimed at fostering conscious consumption among the population, such as reducing paper and water usage, promoting the reuse of items (for instance, the WARPiT Reuse information portal), and minimizing food waste;
- the implementation of volunteer programs involving both students and faculty members;
- dialogue and cooperation between educational institutions and businesses in the context of implementing social and educational grant programmes.

Social responsibility in education encompasses the following key aspects:

- environmental responsibility (educational institutions have increasingly introduced environmental literacy programs that encourage schoolchildren and students to understand the importance of sustainable development and the conservation of natural resources);
- social justice and equality (the modern education system places growing emphasis on understanding and upholding the principles of social equality, human rights, and inclusion, while creating an environment in which every individual has the opportunity to realize their potential);
- adherence to ethical and moral principles in educational institutions (the cultivation of moral values and a responsible attitude toward society is becoming an integral component of the educational process, reflected in school curricula as well as university disciplines, where learning is combined with the ethical evaluation of practices and decisions);
- preparing students for civic engagement (social responsibility in education also entails encouraging students to participate actively in volunteer projects, local initiatives, and other forms of civic involvement).

Summarizing the findings of theoretical and empirical research (Kremen et al., 2024; Lugovyi et al., 2024; Meseguer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Petersen & Kruss, 2021), it can be noted that international practice demonstrates that successful educational programs implemented in higher education institutions and aimed at fostering social responsibility share several common characteristics: a focus on the personal development of students, the promotion of independent and critical thinking, and the encouragement of students, as citizens, to make responsible decisions.

Forms of social responsibility are distinguished as voluntary (expressed in the obligation of the subject to comply with the prescriptions of social norms) and compulsory (expressed in the obligation of the violator of social norms to submit to various social and/or state sanctions) (Social Responsibility in Higher Education Institutions, 2023, p. 10).

Social responsibility in higher education institutions includes a number of functions aimed at improving the quality of higher education and promoting the development of society as a whole. Let us highlight them.

1. Creating a safe and supportive educational environment. The purpose of this function is to provide students with a sense of security and peace of mind. Higher education institutions must ensure the safety and comfort of students and employees, creating conditions for learning and development. The implementation of this function implies the development and

implementation of safety policies in higher education institutions (such as creation of evacuation plans, emergency procedures); supporting psychological well-being as a contribution to the creation of a positive and supportive academic environment where students and teachers feel comfortable and protected. This may include conducting psychological support training, organizing support groups and other measures to preserve mental health; promoting a safety culture (the importance of following safety rules and mutual respect, active participation in activities to promote a safety culture can contribute to creating a safe and supportive environment for all).

Creating a safe educational environment is one of the primary tasks of educational institutions in Ukraine under martial law, the implementation of which should ensure the right to safe and harmless learning conditions for children and youth.

2. Development of civic consciousness and activity. Education should contribute to the formation of civic values, the development of critical thinking, and the ability to make responsible decisions. Civic activity is not specified as a mandatory requirement in the regulatory documents of higher education institutions. However, in many countries it is consistently maintained at the level of volunteer work.

3. Support for inclusivity and equality. Higher education institutions should create conditions for the education of all students, regardless of their race, gender, social status, or other characteristics.

Inclusion and equality in higher education are important principles that contribute to the creation of a fair and equitable society. These principles affirm the right of every person to access quality education, regardless of their individual characteristics, social status, or physical abilities. Supporting inclusivity and equality in education is an essential task for modern education systems.

Inclusion in higher education involves creating conditions where every student, regardless of their characteristics, has access to learning and development. Equality in education means ensuring equal opportunities for all participants in the educational process. This includes equal access to education, equal conditions for learning and development, as well as the absence of discrimination on any grounds. Equality in education fosters a fair environment where everyone can realize their potential and achieve success, regardless of their starting conditions.

The implementation of the function of supporting inclusion and equality in education requires the adoption of management policies aimed at creating a barrier-free learning environment, supporting diversity and mutual respect, and ensuring equal opportunities for all participants in the educational process.

4. Promoting sustainable development as a concept aimed at meeting the needs of the current generation without harming the future ones. Today, students should be educated in the spirit of environmental conservation and rational use of resources. Promoting sustainable development in educational institutions is an important component of the modern educational process. Educational institutions play a key role in forming responsible citizens who understand the importance of sustainable development and contribute actively to its implementation. Sustainable development is based on three key principles: economic sustainability (efficient use of resources), social equality (justice within society) and environmental responsibility (conservation of nature and combating climate change).

This function can be implemented in the following ways: integrating the concept of sustainable development into curricula; implementing environmental initiatives in schools and universities; organizing eco-flash mobs and clean-up campaigns; introducing separate waste collection; using energy-efficient technologies; raising environmental awareness among students; conducting seminars, workshops, and excursions to nature reserves; fostering a

culture of reducing the consumption of disposable items; supporting social equality; implementing anti-bullying programs; incorporating issues of gender equality and tolerance into educational activities; collaborating with communities and international organizations as well as establishing partnerships with local environmental organizations.

5. Social partnership with the public and other stakeholders. Higher education institutions should collaborate with the public, businesses, local authorities, and other organizations to achieve common goals.

The function of social partnership of educational institutions is a form of cooperation between an educational institution, participants in the educational process and external partners (public organizations, businesses, local authorities, parents, other educational or research institutions) in order to effectively solve educational, social and educational tasks. Within the framework of the implementation of this function, partners are involved in the development and implementation of modern curricula and practical classes, preparing pupils and students for real conditions of professional activity through internships, trainings and projects, ensuring access to new knowledge, technologies and innovations through cooperation with scientific institutions, enterprises and other partners; a civic position is formed and developed in education seekers; social responsibility arises.

The above-mentioned functions of social responsibility in education contribute to the creation of a harmonious and developed society, where everyone has the opportunity to receive a quality education and develop at all levels.

Social responsibility in education in the context of strategic management is understood as a policy of continuous improvement of higher education institutions (HEIs) in order to fulfil effectively the social mission through various areas of management: the organizational sphere (HEIs as an entity with its own structure, which consumes, employs personnel, and generates household waste); the educational sphere (HEIs as an entity responsible for the teaching and upbringing of children and youth); the social sphere (HEIs as entities that establish partnerships and interact with interested communities).

Interpreting the variability of social responsibility in education involves understanding and applying different approaches to the formation of socially responsible behaviour among children and youth, depending on the needs of society and the specific characteristics of each educational institution. This implies that social responsibility is not a universal model but may vary according to cultural, socio-economic, and regional conditions, as well as the individual needs of learners.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the theoretical analysis showed that the social responsibility of national higher education is a complex concept that integrates the relationship of higher education institutions with society in the dimensions of service, mission, involvement, and social impact. Its content and functions are shaped under the influence of the institutional and organizational environment, which determines the ways of implementing this responsibility in the practice of higher education. The normativity of this concept is explained by the dependence of higher education on external social and economic factors that influence its priorities. At the same time, social responsibility in higher education is not limited to the professional training of students but also encompasses the formation of civic activity and values that are important for social development. As a result, the educational process acquires a deeper meaning, combining knowledge with the cultivation of a responsible attitude toward the public good.

The implementation of the functions of social responsibility in educational institutions should, on a voluntary basis, include obligations to interact with relevant social groups and society as a whole. This requires the leadership of educational institutions to develop pro-

grams and mechanisms that can be implemented in institutional activities, ensuring their development, supporting their reputation, and strengthening social partnership.

It was found that the conceptual foundations of social responsibility in educational institutions define a system of fundamental ideas, principles, and provisions that shape a general vision and understanding of activities in the educational sphere based on ethics, environmental sustainability, and accessibility.

The results of the theoretical analysis of scientific sources made it possible to identify the following functions of social responsibility in education: the creation of a safe and favourable educational environment, the development of civic consciousness and activity, the promotion of inclusiveness and equality, the advancement of sustainable development, and partnership with the public and other stakeholders.

Therefore, the results of the systematic review highlight important unresolved issues related to the social responsibility of higher education institutions. In particular, the further study is required to develop mechanisms for assessing the social impact of higher education institutions and to clarify the role of the institutional environment in disseminating social responsibility practices at the organizational level.

A promising direction is to expand the empirical base of research through the application of diverse methodological approaches and comparative analysis. It is also advisable to draw on the experience of corporate social responsibility in business to develop more comprehensive models in the field of higher education. Future research should take into account a broader geographical context, which will contribute to the formation of a holistic understanding of the social responsibility of universities in the global dimension.

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