

Construction and validation of criteria for university social responsibility assessment

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Abstract

The purpose of the current research was to construct and validate an instrument for evaluating social responsibility in Razi University. For this purpose, the sequential exploratory mixed research method was used, and in the qualitative part, the focus group discussion method ($n = 27$) was utilized. The statistical population in the quantitative section were doctoral students, faculty members and experts of Razi University ($N=1425$), of which 152 were selected as a statistical sample using stratified proportional assignment sampling. The external and content validity of the research tool was confirmed by the focus group discussion and the calculation of the content validity ratio and construct validity using the average variance extracted and its reliability through the calculation of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The findings of the research showed that the activities of the university to fulfill its social responsibility towards society in 9 dimensions including responsibility towards students, responsibility towards staff and faculty members, economic responsibility, responsibility towards partner universities (inter-university cooperation), responsibility towards the external society, responsibility for the environment, responsibility for quality education, responsibility for cultural development and responsibility for the leadership (management) of the university can be identified. In total, these dimensions explain 81.518% of the variance of the university's social responsibility. In addition, the findings indicated that the activities of the university in the field of social responsibility do not have the same weight and each one has a different weight and contribution.

Keywords: university social responsibility, assessment, focus group discussion, sequential exploratory mixed methods, Razi University.



Introduction

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University Social Responsibility (USR) projects as learning spaces can foster the development of “decision-making capacities, participation and personal involvement and accountability on the part of students, that generally translates into autonomous behaviors” (Coelho & Menezes, 2020). According to studies in the field (Lo, Pang, Egri & Li, 2017), universities’ commitment to USR practices and their investment in curriculum design and teaching practices that meet students’ needs and expectations demonstrate a focus on their students and on fostering socially responsible citizens. Moreover, integrating social responsibility into the university structure plays a fundamental role in community security, social accountability, reducing government spending, reducing urban management problems, resolving social conflicts, eliminating poverty, and ensuring environmental sustainability (Baradaran Haghir, Noorshahi & Roshan, 2019). Given the importance of USR in achieving sustainable development goals in all its forms (economic, social, and environmental), many projects have been implemented to integrate it into the university’s structures (Ayuso, Carbonell & Serradell, 2021; Baradaran Haghir et al., 2019; Chen & Vanclay, 2021; Coelho & Menezes, 2020; de Sousa, Siqueira, Binotto & Nobre, 2020; Terán-Bustamante & Torres-Vargas, 2020a).

However, according to Aristimuño and Rodríguez (2014), achieving socially responsible behavior in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a complex task because it requires profound changes at the level of organizational culture, the development of awareness processes, and transversal incorporation of USR, integrating this concept into the institution’s strategic plans and allowing for its implementation in practice. Another difficulty derives from the fact that many take an endogenous approach focused on the interests of the university community itself and fail to make it compatible with the interests and needs of surrounding social actors who, in fact, facilitate its growth and development (Gaete Quezada, 2015).

Empirical evidence in Iran indicates the indifference of universities to social responsibility due to these difficulties (Baradaran Haghir et al., 2019). This has caused many social problems such as unemployment of graduates, incompatibility between students’ skills and labor market needs, lack of systematic connection between the needs of society and university outputs, the university’s irresponsibility towards its graduates, destruction of the environment by community members who were once members of the university, and so on (Alizadeh, Sedighi, Pezeshki Rad & Farasatkah, 2017; Sharifzadeh & Abdollahzadeh, 2009). In addition to the challenges outlined in the previous research studies, lacking a comprehensive assessment framework for USR is another challenge that Iranian universities encounter ((Habibi, Vazifehdust & Jafari, 2016). Therefore, the purpose of the

manuscript is to fill this gap by designing a comprehensive assessment framework for USR in Iranian universities. This research answers the following questions: 1) What are the USR dimensions? 2) What is the contribution of each of these dimensions in explaining social responsibility? 3) What are the indicators of each dimension? and 4) What is the weight of each indicator in explaining USR?

Methodology

To accomplish the research goal, a mixed-methods approach (both qualitative and quantitative) was used in this study. The procedure used to develop a measure for USR follow the generally accepted principles of instrument design (Latif, 2018). It involves (i) the identification of the domain for the construct, (ii) item generation by the literature review and focus group discussions, (iii) the categorization of items into determinants, (iv) initial data collection and purification (A. expert validation; B. pilot testing; and C. scale modification, refinement, and finalization), (v) data collection, (vi) exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the underlying dimensions using IBM SPSS, and (vii) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test reliability and validity using LISREL software. We added another step to these steps, i.e., weight assignment to the items.

In the qualitative phase of the research, we used the focus group discussion technique on 27 Razi University experts selected by the purposeful sampling method. The statistical population in the quantitative phase included faculty members, Ph.D. students, and Razi University staff (N= 1425) out of whom 152 people were selected by the stratified sampling method. The composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) were used to evaluate reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE), content validity ratio (CVR), and focus group discussion were also used to confirm the instrument's validity. The results are shown in Table (1).

Table 1. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire

USR dimensions	CVR	AVE	Reliability	
			CR	Cronbach's alpha
Responsibility toward students	0.81	0.46	0.88	0.87
Responsibility toward faculty members and staff	0.91	0.70	0.90	0.89
Economic responsibility	0.74	0.43	0.83	0.82
Responsibility toward peer university	0.67	0.64	0.92	0.92
Responsibility toward the local community	0.70	0.62	0.92	0.94
Responsibility toward environmental protection	0.69	0.72	0.93	0.92
Responsibility toward high-quality education	0.62	0.50	0.66	0.70
Responsibility toward culture building	0.58	0.42	0.65	0.69
Senior managers' social responsibility	0.74	0.68	0.87	0.86

Findings

The results showed that USR dimensions can be classified into nine categories: 1) responsibility to students; 2) responsibility to faculty members and staff; 3) economic responsibility; 4) responsibility to peer university; 5) responsibility to the local community; 6) pro-environmental activities; 7) responsibility to high-quality education; 8) responsibility to culture building; and 9) senior managers' social responsibility. All of these dimensions captured 81.518 percent of the USR variance. Moreover, the results revealed that the USR indicators had different weights in universities' movements to do their social responsibility. The results are summarized in Table (2).

Table 2. USR dimensions and their items and weights

Dimensions	Items	Factor Load	Valiance Ratio	Secondary amounts	Item weight	Final weight	Priority
Responsibility toward students	The recruitment rate of graduates	0.86	0.20	0.18	0.21	0.71	1
	Student participation in USR-related activities	0.77		0.16	0.19	0.57	3
	Unsettled student complaints, students' complaint statistics, and trends	0.74		0.15	0.18	0.47	5
	Number/percentage of education projects with USR focus	0.90		0.18	0.22	0.16	2
	Student dropout rate	0.72		0.15	0.18	0.57	4
Responsibility toward faculty members and staff	Presence of women in managerial or senior management positions at the university	0.81	0.16	0.13	0.11	0.53	4
	Hiring employees with disabilities	0.85		0.14	0.11	0.42	7
	Providing low-interest loans to staff and faculty members	0.77		0.13	0.10	0.47	6
	Not hiring staff by the university to perform tasks beyond their ability and duty	0.81		0.13	0.11	0.52	5

Dimensions	Items	Factor Load	Valiance Ratio	Secondary amounts	Item weight	Final weight	Priority
	Protecting the confidentiality and privacy of the faculty and staff	0.86		0.14	0.11	0.7	1
	Involvement of staff and faculty members in voluntary civil activities	0.79		0.13	0.10	0.53	3
	Attending work on-time	0.77		0.13	0.10	0.53	
	Efforts to perform organizational and professional duties by university staff	0.77		0.13	0.10	0.58	2
Responsibility toward the local community	Number of community projects jointly organized with businesses	0.70	0.16	0.19	0.22	0.59	4
	Percentage of faculty members and staff participating in community services	0.77		0.13	0.24	0.60	2
	The transfer of knowledge from the university to the community	0.85		0.14	0.27	0.60	3
	Number of endowments from the business community related to USR (e.g. research/education programs, faculty chairs, scholarships, etc.)	0.77		0.13	0.25	0.68	1
Responsibility toward high-quality education	Education for active citizenship	0.83	0.14	0.11	0.20	0.66	1
	Integrating social issues into the body of knowledge	0.87		0.12	0.20	0.64	2
	Integrating social problems into students' practical assignments	0.80		0.11	0.19	0.56	3
	Teaching informed decision-making to the university's human resources	0.82		0.11	0.19	0.55	4
	Fostering and promoting the level of students' creativity	0.80		0.11	0.19	0.56	3
Responsibility toward environmental protection	Number of complaints related to environment and pollution	0.84	0.10	0.08	0.19	0.57	5
	Energy consumption reduction	0.87		0.08	0.20	0.61	4
	Use of renewable energy (e.g., solar energy)	0.88		0.08	0.20	0.53	3
	Separation of drinking water from other uses (such as bath water)	0.84		0.08	0.19	0.63	2
	Number of community projects jointly organized with NGOs concerning environmental issues	0.87		0.08	0.20	0.63	1
Responsibility toward peer university	Experience sharing on USR issues/topics	0.83	0.09	0.07	0.16	0.60	2
	Conference attendance related to USR	0.87		0.07	0.17	0.58	4
	Number of co-authored publications on social and environmental topics	0.81		0.07	0.16	0.60	1
	Rate of student exchange with peer universities	0.83		0.07	0.16	0.59	3
	Rate of faculty members exchange with peer universities	0.88		0.07	0.17	0.58	5
	Communicating with reputable foreign universities	0.82		0.07	0.16	0.51	6

Dimensions	Items	Factor Load	Valiance Ratio	Secondary amounts	Item weight	Final weight	Priority
Responsibility toward Culture building	The patience of university staff in responding to the client	0.81	0.05	0.04	0.10	0.64	2
	Transparency of decisions made by university managers	0.82		0.04	0.10	0.59	4
	Paying attention to the opinions and wishes of stakeholders (students, staff, faculty members) in university decisions	0.84		0.04	0.11	0.65	1
	Inviting local people to visit the campus and vice versa (going into the local community and identifying their problems)	0.83		0.04	0.11	0.53	6
	Reducing bureaucracy	0.84		0.04	0.11	0.53	7
	Taking group actions to solve social problems	0.80		0.04	0.10	0.43	9
	Monitoring staff performance	0.82		0.04	0.10	0.53	5
	University funding for USR-related research	0.85		0.04	0.11	0.45	8
	Using the experiences of the university's manpower to solve social problems in the local community	0.86		0.04	0.11	0.59	3
Economic responsibility	Holding a meeting with the local government or the university's funding agencies	0.77	0.03	0.2	0.18	0.68	3
	Number of university management reports on USR to government/funding bodies	0.80		0.2	0.19	0.67	4
	Gaining credit for implementing research projects	0.84		0.03	0.20	0.65	5
	Financial transparency	0.85		0.03	0.20	0.80	1
	Timely payment of taxes, duties, and insurance premiums	0.88		0.03	0.21	0.74	2
Senior managers' social responsibility	Paying attention to the psychological issues of the university community	0.81	0.02	0.02	0.14	0.58	3
	Hygiene in different parts of the university	0.76		0.01	0.13	0.60	1
	Holding sports competitions by the university managers to create vitality in the university community	0.83		0.02	0.14	0.58	2
	Establishment of knowledge-based companies	0.86		0.02	0.15	0.58	4
	Creating a connection between the university and the industry	0.80		0.02	0.13	0.50	7

Dimensions	Items	Factor Load	Valiance Ratio	Secondary amounts	Item weight	Final weight	Priority
	A clear procedure for doing administrative work and avoiding wasting client time	0.86		0.02	0.15	0.55	5
	No gender discrimination	0.74		0.01	0.13	0.54	6

Discussion

USR is a broad, evolving, and interpretable concept that makes it difficult to measure. Therefore, by providing a comprehensive definition of USR, we provide a practical and reliable tool for evaluating it using systematic methods. The findings of this study help to develop the literature on USR and its evaluation. Forming focus groups and systematically reviewing relevant research records helped us identify new aspects of USR that had not received much attention in previous research. Moreover, we showed that not all items of the tools developed for USR assessment have the same weight, and each has a different weight and range of impact. Accordingly, researchers who will use this tool to assess the university's social responsibility should pay attention to the items' weights and consider them in their final report.

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