



Social responsibility in higher educational institutions: A review of literature

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Abstract

The concept of Institutional responsibility is the offshoot of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of business houses. But social responsibility in an educational institution is different from corporate social responsibility practiced by the corporate companies. It is neither mandatory nor researched in the Indian context. This review of the literature tries to explore the existing literature on the practice of social responsibilities in higher education. It also throws light on research on social responsibilities in Indian higher educational institutions. The paper tries to look into the existing models of social responsibilities and to apply it to the educational institution.

Keywords: Educational Institutions, Corporate Social Responsibility, Institutional social responsibility, community engagement, outreach activity.

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Introduction

In the 21st century due to challenges such as globalization, privatization of the educational institutions, and competition in the education industry, many education institutions are struggling to compete and survive (Gumport 2000, Gioia and Thomas 1996). At this juncture, some institutions are accepting the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility as an image-building strategy (Stensaker 2007, Melewar and Akel 2005).

The purpose of corporate social responsibility or CSR is to guide organizations to act ethically and transparently that contributes to the health and welfare of society. The concept of social responsibility is mainly practiced and promoted by corporate houses. However, it is also became a prominent issue in educational sector, where education institutions can and should play a role in development of civic values and responsibilities (Colby et.al. 2003).

Practicing social responsibilities has two goals: firstly, discharging its responsibilities towards the community where it exists. Secondly, to build an image among its target group i.e. students, community, parents, governments, etc. So the mutual understanding between the institution and the public can be achieved by practicing socially responsible activities. In the following parts, we can trace attempts, in which the institutional responsibility practices and frameworks are discussed.

The second UNESCO conference on higher education held in Paris in July 2009 recognized the significance of social responsibility and community engagement for institutions of higher education; its declaration stated that higher education has the responsibility of functioning for the public good and it is responsible for all its stakeholders. It should respond to the prevailing challenges like food security, climate change, energy conservation, water management, cleanliness, public health, etc. So the social responsibility in education implies a movement of the higher educational institutions towards consideration of social and environmental concerns.

In India as part of the promotion of higher education, University Grants Commission in its XII plan guidelines (2012-2017), has come up with a plan of the establishment of a Centre for Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement (CFSRCE) in universities. The Scheme was launched in October 2014. The scheme promotes community engagement in higher education institutions. The main areas of concern for this scheme include:

‘Promoting community-university partnerships to develop knowledge for improving the lives of the people and to encourage participatory research, and to in alliance with community-based organizations in planning and execution of projects. It seeks to propagate integration of service, service-learning, and experiential learning into curricular/co-curricular programs’ (P.1,2. XII plan guidelines, UGC).

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (India) highlighted the institutional social responsibilities aspect of educational institutions. Criterion VII (7.1) of the self study report is captured in the following Key Indicators:

‘The institution displays sensitivity to issues like climate change and environmental issues. It adopts environment-friendly practices and takes necessary actions such as – energy conservation, rainwater harvesting, waste recycling (solid/liquid waste management, e-waste management), carbon-neutral, green practices, etc. The institution facilitates the differently-abled (Divyangjan friendliness), effective dealing of location advantages and disadvantages (situatedness), explicit concern for human values and professional ethics, etc. In other words, the concerns for social responsibilities as well as the values held by the institution are explicit in its regular activities’’ (p.21)

The above references prove that there are policy statements regarding the practice of institutional responsibility in the higher educational institution. However, what is lacking is a proper definition and framework for such activities. Most of the educational institutions practice socially responsible activities but there is a lack of proper policy guidelines regarding ISR Practice. In Ethical, moral, and civic value practices most of the institutions rely on teaching these practices rather than encouraging students to imbibe these activities.

So, the ISR practice in the educational institution has been largely individual attempts of institutions and the faculty member, who is in charge of this. To achieve the purpose of societal development through an educational institution, it is important to have a holistic functional approach to the socially responsible activity of the educational institution. This review paper is a humble attempt to classify these activities and to relate the activities to the existing model of corporate social responsibilities.

Social responsibility in higher educational institutions

The importance of Social responsibility in the educational field is being debated from the last decade. But the existing literature has shown that the discussion and research on educational social responsibility and its competitive advantage is still in its nascent stage, the concept has to be still researched, argued upon, and discussed.

As mentioned in the introductory part, the concept of social responsibility was adopted first at the University setup. The first study on social responsibility can be traced back to the work of Vallaeys (2007) where he studied the efforts of 13 Universities in Chile. After Vallaeys' recognition of social responsibilities in the educational field, academicians and other external researchers have undertaken studies. Most of their discussions focused on the challenges that institutions of higher education have faced regarding the practice of social responsibility, establishing principles and reasons to adopt social responsibilities in their routine.

Vallaeys (2007), in his seminal article *Responsabilidad Social Universitaria: Propuesta Para Una Definición Madura E Eficiente* (University Social Responsibility: Proposal for a Mature and Efficient Definition), discusses definitions of social responsibility in higher education and points out that in a university setting social responsibility cannot merely be understood as philanthropy but rather as an orientation integrated into the mandate and programming of the university. In his view, social responsibility should not be considered separate from the normal functioning of the university and must not be confused with individual acts of generosity that mask underlying problems within the organization. It should rather be understood as an inherent characteristic of the organization that suggests a different mode of administering organizations at once internally and in its relationship with the exterior (Vallaeys, 2007, p. 3---4). In other words, social responsibility is at once internal and external and is integrated into the functioning of the institution.

Vallaeys (2007) bases his assessment of the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) on its impact on society. To better understand the role that the HEIs can play in society, Vallaeys (2007) looks first at the impact that the university has on society and groups them under four key areas: impact of organizational functioning (on staff, students, and the environment), educational impact, cognitive impact, and social impact. Based on these

impacts, four activities are identified that make a university socially responsible: Responsible campus (ethical and democratic internal processes and respect for the environment), responsible education (curriculum supports and promotes the sustainable development of society), the socially responsible management (participatory approaches to research involving human subjects, broad dissemination of findings), community-based participatory research and communities of mutual learning for development (Vallaey, 2007). By identifying how the higher education institution impacts organizational functioning, education, cognitive development, and social behavior, Vallaey (2007) can specify what role higher education institutions play in embedding principles of social responsibility into each type of impact.

A Sub-committee on “Strengthening Community Engagement in Higher Education” set up by the Planning Commission in 2011 brought out a paper on ‘Fostering Social Responsibility in Higher Education in India’. The paper includes some case studies and recommendations for the effective implementation of community engagement and socially responsible activities. The committee listed some socially responsible activities like Linking and learning with community service, linking research with community knowledge, Knowledge sharing, and knowledge mobilization, Devising new curricula and courses as well as focus on pedagogy, including practitioners as teachers, etc.

Richa Mishra and Aditya Awasthi (2016) conducted research titled ‘An exploratory study on awareness towards institutional social responsibility in Indian higher education institutions’. The purpose of the paper was to examine the perception of the concept of ISR in Educational Institutes in India. The paper opted for a questionnaire-based exploratory survey of 500 faculty members, across Private Universities in Rajasthan. The findings suggest, lacking awareness but a significant acceptance of the need for ISR practices. The paper includes implications for the Universities to include ISR practices in their strategy to address its obligations to the society and simultaneously gain a competitive advantage. The research tried to discover the awareness, acceptance, and appliance of the concept of ISR in Private Universities.

The conclusion declares a favourable result and suggests that it is indeed necessary to spread awareness towards the concept and practice of ISR. Researchers have noted some suggestions regarding the inclusion of ISR policy in educational institutions.

Dr. Sampada Gulavani, Dr. Nitin Nayak, Dr. Madhumita Nayak (2016) conducted a study on CSR in Higher Education. The study found out that, 'to survive in a highly competitive scenario, higher education institutions and universities require strong corporate strategies. CSR facilitates continuous improvement in higher education institutes with external impact and internal capacity, performance, and management'

Shubangi Kakade (2016) in her study adopted a survey method to garner the socially responsible activities of Business schools, knowledge and perception of academicians, the priority of various socially responsible activities, etc. The researcher has found out that despite various limitations business schools discharge their ISR activities. Academicians perceive Social Responsible activities as an important tool for image building.

CSR Practices in Higher Education

This part of the research tried to trace the classification of social responsibility activities under various subcategories and attempted to relate the existing model of corporate social responsibility to the practice of social responsibility in higher educational institutions based on existing literature.

Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) includes community service activities like outreach activity; an ethical framework to inculcate a sense of civic-mindedness and responsibility among students and administrative staff, the contribution for sustainable development through environmental concern, undertaking research activities which help the community and nation at large (Vasilescu et al., 2010; Shawyun, 2011).

Turk- Bicakci & Brint (2005) noted that the research activities conducted by the institutions must be socially responsible. Therefore, universities must guarantee that their research activities must be beneficial to the stakeholders, communities, and society.

Dr. Sampada Gulavani, Dr. Nitin Nayak, Dr. Madhumita Nayak (2016) listed the following activity of ISR by the educational institutions:

- Design of courses related to social responsibility subject
- CSR on Environment: It covers the activities related to environmental concerns like conserving energy, waste management, awareness program about protecting the environment, etc.

- CSR on Community: It is based on institutions investment to communities such as donation of money, time, services, technology, experts, and other resources to make a positive contribution towards local communities.
- CSR by establishing Research Centre: Undertaking scientific research, training, and vocational programs, publications, and documentation of the social, economic, and cultural development of the civil society by establishing a research center.
- CSR towards Stakeholders: The activities should cover collaborations among stakeholders like students, parents, alumni, organizations, and government departments.

As it is discussed earlier institutional responsibility comprises various activities. From the above studies and definitions and existing practices of ISR in educational institutions; we can list out the ISR in educational institutions as follows;

- Policy statement regarding ISR/ inclusion in the vision of the institution.
- Community Engagement and Outreach activity
- Environmental initiatives
- Offering institutions resources to the community
- Research initiatives and innovations to help the local community
- Involvement of students in its socially responsible activities in turn to imbibe values and ethical behavior among the students.
- Collaboration with alumni, parents, governments, and corporate houses
- Including ISR related awareness topics in the curriculum; it may include promoting human rights and social inclusion values and ethics among them.

Theorization attempts

There were certain attempts to form a model of ISR in an educational institution that can benefit both the ends. These models are influenced by the Carrolls CSR Pyramid model (1991).

The four responsibilities displayed on Carroll's pyramid are:

Economic Responsibility: This is the responsibility to look after the profitability of the business. The target is to get long term benefit.

Legal Responsibility: This is the responsibility to follow laws, rules, and regulations. E.g: Employment, Competition, Health, and Safety.

Ethical Responsibility: This is the responsibility to act morally and ethically. It includes giving back to society. Its environmental concerns etc. This responsibility goes beyond the narrow requirement of rules and regulations.

Philanthropic: This responsibility includes giving back to the society where it exists. Closely related to ethical responsibility. It includes all charitable donations, extending institutions' resources and expertise to the public, etc.

Shubangi Kakade (2016) in her study 'A Study of Programs and Practices of Corporate Social Responsibility by B Schools in Pune region' adopted the Carrols CSR model into Business schools' social responsibility. The researcher has used four responsibilities of Carrol's model and added one more activity called the strategic move, she has stressed that to meet the global competition social responsibility must be a strategic activity to gain brand image. But in this study, the proper details of activities under each phase is not defined.

Conclusion

The above literature on the practice of social responsibility is an attempt to throw light on socially responsible activities of the educational institution. While examining the literature, it was found the ISR practice in an educational institution is concerned with the policy statements regarding the practice of institutional responsibility in higher educational institutions is very much in place. However, there is a lack of a proper institutionalized framework for such activities. Although most of the educational institutions practice socially responsible activities, proper guidelines regarding ISR is lacking. ISR practices have largely been individual attempts of institutions and few interested faculty members.

And concerning theorization attempts, it was observed that most of the studies one or another way cited the Carrols Model (1991) of Corporate Social Responsibility to categorize the practices such as economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility. But as educational institutions are different from corporate houses there is more concentration on ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility in available studies. The sub-functions under these activities can be a good rationale to classify the practice of social responsibilities in educational institutions. Hence, future researchers of ISR can focus more on laying a theoretical foundation for this all-important area of academic research.

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