
Academic guardianship: The role of faculties in shaping university social responsibility in Nepal's business schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the intricate relationship between USR and the pivotal role played by faculties in shaping and executing these responsibilities. Faculties are the lifeblood of any academic institution, and their engagement is instrumental in translating USR into tangible actions and outcomes. Through a comprehensive exploration of USR principles and the multifaceted contributions of faculties, this chapter aims to provide a holistic understanding of how universities can effectively integrate social responsibility into their core mission.

KEYWORDS: Smart Phone, Addiction, Stress, Social Environment, Psychology, Mental Wellbeing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of Social Responsibility (SR) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) extends far beyond the confines of education. HEIs are not just providers of knowledge; they are critical components of the societal fabric, charged with the responsibility of meeting the evolving needs of their communities (Si & Van, 2020). The concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) has emerged, drawing inspiration from the world of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). USR signifies a university's commitment to recognizing and addressing the interests of society by delivering high-quality educational services.

In an interconnected world, institutions cannot operate in isolation, and their actions have far-reaching consequences on society. Just as corporations are expected to shoulder responsibilities that transcend mere profit-making, universities too must acknowledge their impact and obligations (Huempfer & Kopf, 2017). After all, they are the engines of knowledge dissemination and societal progress. USR has become a strategic imperative for university management, serving both as an internal compass for institutional self-improvement and as an external measure for enhancing reputation. Various stakeholders involved in HEIs play a significant role in advancing both national and global economies

through their contributions to research and education. Consequently, it is crucial to enhance our understanding of the concept of stakeholders in the context of universities, as emphasized by Tetrevova and Sabolova (2010).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

University Social Responsibility (USR)

To understand the idea of university social responsibility accurately, it's important to keep in mind that universities have a different primary focus compared to businesses. They aren't primarily driven by maximizing profits or minimizing risks. Nonetheless, like any other market-driven organization, the main objective of a university is to meet the unique needs of the people who benefit from their services. The idea of USR originated in Chile back in 2001, driven by the collaborative efforts of 13 universities in partnership with the Construye País (Build Country) initiative (Valleys, 2007). The primary aim of this project was to promote and extend the understanding and implementation of USR within the Chilean university system. USR is a concept that has gained prominence in recent years within the higher education landscape. It encompasses the idea that HEIs have a moral and ethical obligation to go beyond their primary mission of imparting knowledge and research (Latif, 2018). They are called upon to actively engage with their surrounding communities and society at large. Much like the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for businesses, USR involves universities voluntarily assuming responsibilities that extend beyond their economic and legal obligations. At its core, USR reflects a university's commitment to recognizing and addressing the broader interests of society, ultimately seeking to enhance the well-being of its members. It is one of the strategies for both internal oversight of the university and enhancing its external reputation (Parsons, 2014). This commitment manifests through a variety of initiatives and activities, such as community outreach programs, sustainability efforts, ethical research practices, and the cultivation of responsible, socially aware graduates. USR, therefore, represents a fundamental shift in the way HEIs perceive their role and impact, highlighting the importance of their contributions to the betterment of society beyond the classroom and laboratory.

In Kouatli's (2019) most recent definition of USR, a significant emphasis is placed on adopting a stakeholder-centered perspective. This perspective encourages active involvement from various stakeholders in the university's efforts to contribute to economic, social, environmental, and academic knowledge. It also highlights the importance of aligning these contributions with the diverse needs of society at different levels. Additionally, Kouatli's definition underscores the creation of initiatives and activities geared towards achieving a robust level of sustainability, making USR a multifaceted approach that bridges academia and society while striving for a sustainable future. The importance of addressing the concept of USR has received validation through numerous international documents, treaties, standards, agreements, and declarations designed to propagate the principles of social responsibility on a global scale. The United Nations Global Compact stands out as one of the largest and most voluntary initiatives globally, dedicated to advancing CSR. During the World Economic Forum on January 31, 1999, Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, urged business leaders to participate in an international effort known as the Global Compact. This initiative aimed to unite companies, UN agencies, Labor organizations, and public entities in support of worldwide environmental and social principles.

USR initiatives in support of Global compact effort are widely regarded as a valuable instrument for achieving sustainability and improving the overall performance of universities on a global scale. Developed nations' universities emphasize a greater focus on enduring core values in the long run, whereas universities in transitioning countries and underdeveloped economics like Nepal tend to prioritize short-term activities with a focus on their stakeholders (Huang & Do, 2021). The social responsibility of a university should be linked to objectives such as guaranteeing the excellence of education, transferring knowledge to boost economic growth, educating the next generation of leaders, implementing proactive social initiatives for students, faculty, and staff, and removing societal obstacles (Adilov, 2013).

Business schools have undertaken various initiatives to encourage socially responsible behaviour across all aspects of their operations. The European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) plays a pivotal role in advancing the quality and accreditation of business schools worldwide. EFMD offers two prestigious accreditations, EQUIS and EPAS, which are recognized as the most comprehensive systems for assessing and accrediting business schools and their programs. EQUIS ensures rigorous quality control and benchmarks institutions against international standards in various areas, including governance, programs, faculty, research, internationalization, ethics, responsibility, and sustainability. On the other hand, EPAS covers all aspects of program provision, focusing on academic rigor, practical relevance, internationalization, and ethics and sustainability. The integration of these initiatives into business schools is crucial for the development of the concept of "USR" (presumably referring to University Social Responsibility) with a particular emphasis on ethics and sustainability (Wigmore-Álvarez, 2020).

A noteworthy survey conducted by EFMD in collaboration with The Academy of Business in Society (ABIS) in 2013 aimed to identify barriers to integrating sustainability issues into academic institutions (EFMD- ABIS, 2013). According to the findings, faculty members identified the top three significant obstacles as (1) Journal rankings and editorial policy, (2) Faculty interest, and (3) Research funding. Conversely, the least significant hindrances were perceived as (1) Library services, (2) Alumni pressure to maintain the status quo, and (3) Collaboration with other business schools and universities. The survey also examined sustainability criteria within Human Resources policies, revealing a notable disparity between deans and faculty regarding the importance of such integration, with only 35% of deans considering sustainability-related criteria as crucial for recruitment and retention. Not all initiatives have been given equal consideration or exerted the same level of influence in the advancement of USR. Overall, there has been a prevailing emphasis on social responsibility reporting initiatives from all corners (Góes & Magrini, 2016).

The Role of Faculties in Shaping University Social Responsibility (USR): Faculty members play a crucial role in imparting discipline-specific knowledge and skills to students, empowering them to make valuable contributions as active members of both their communities and the professional world. The primary hurdle faced by faculty is determining how to align curricula with the evolving demands of the world (Taylor and Haras, 2020). Faculties play an indispensable role in shaping and implementing USR within HEIs. As academic leaders and educators, they serve as the driving force behind the integration of USR principles into the institution's core mission. Faculties are responsible for designing and delivering curricula that instill a sense of social responsibility in students, helping them develop the knowledge, skills, and values required to become socially conscious individuals. By incorporating themes of ethics, sustainability, and community engagement into their courses, faculties contribute directly to the cultivation of socially responsible graduates who are equipped to tackle real-world societal challenges. A crucial aspect of faculty's role is to help students develop greater social responsibility and ethical sensitivity, as highlighted by Giacalone and Thompson (2006). Despite faculty members having the most significant influence on students, a considerable number of them do not view preparing students for the workforce as part of their responsibilities, as noted by Lederman (2020). The experiences of leading universities illustrate how the role of higher education faculty has evolved from being primarily curriculum developers to becoming creators of partnerships and facilitators of knowledge exchange between HEIs, learners, and the businesses relevant to their careers. In this pivotal capacity, faculty members contribute significantly to closing the skills gap between universities and the professional world, as emphasized by Hahn and Gangness (2019).

Moreover, faculties are often at the forefront of research activities that can have a profound impact on society. Their research endeavors can address pressing social issues, promote ethical conduct in research practices, and generate innovative solutions to complex problems. By actively engaging in research with societal relevance, faculties not only advance knowledge but also demonstrate the university's commitment to making a positive

difference in the world. Their leadership in academic governance and institutional decision-making processes also plays a crucial role in ensuring that USR remains a central focus of the university's activities. In essence, faculties serve as the custodians of USR, nurturing its growth and ensuring its integration into the educational fabric of HEIs.

Within Nepalese business schools, faculty members play a crucial role in promoting University Social Responsibility (USR) in a context specific to business education. They are responsible for instilling ethical values, sustainability awareness, and a sense of social responsibility in future business leaders. Faculty can incorporate Nepal-specific case studies and examples into their curriculum, highlighting local challenges and opportunities for responsible business practices, such as sustainable tourism, community-based entrepreneurship, and ethical supply chain management.

Furthermore, faculty can engage in research that addresses Nepal's unique economic and social landscape, contributing insights that can guide businesses and policymakers toward more socially responsible and sustainable practices. Collaboration with local businesses and organizations can facilitate partnerships for community engagement projects, emphasizing CSR and sustainable development initiatives tailored to Nepal's specific needs.

In addition, faculty involvement in decision-making within business schools can influence the integration of USR principles into the institution's policies, programs, and culture by actively participating in curriculum development, research initiatives, and community outreach, faculty members can contribute significantly to the promotion of USR within Nepalese business schools, ultimately preparing students to be socially responsible business leaders in the local and global context.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have used extensive literature review that synthesizes existing research, journal articles, newspaper reports, and various secondary data sources related to University Social Responsibility and the role of faculties. This will serve as the foundation for conceptual understanding and theoretical framing. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with a select group of faculty members, university administrators, and experts in the field of higher education.

Objectives

- Examine the Conceptual Framework of USR
- Analyse the Integral Role of Faculties in Advancing USR Initiatives

4. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The findings of this research chapter shed light on the integral role that faculties play in shaping and advancing USR within Higher Education Institutions HEIs. It is evident from data that faculties are not merely educators but are, in fact, academic guardians who significantly influence the implementation and success of USR initiatives.

Firstly, we found that the faculties are highly aware of the concept of USR and its importance. They recognize the societal expectations placed upon HEIs and are committed to aligning their teaching, research, and community engagement activities with the principles of social responsibility. Most surveyed faculties expressed a strong sense of moral duty to contribute to the betterment of society through their work within the university.

Furthermore, the research reveals that faculties actively engage in promoting USR in various ways. They contribute to curriculum development by integrating themes of ethics, sustainability, and social responsibility into their courses. This not only equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to address societal challenges but also fosters a culture of responsibility within HEIs.

Additionally, faculties are at the forefront of research endeavours that have a direct societal impact. Whether through community-based research projects, studies addressing pressing social issues, or ethical research practices, faculties contribute significantly to the broader goals of USR. Their dedication to socially relevant research not only advances

knowledge but also demonstrates the university's commitment to being a force for positive change in society.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article underscores the critical importance of faculties as key drivers of USR within Higher Education Institutions. Faculties are not only educators but also academic guardians who influence the integration of USR principles into the core mission of HEIs. Their engagement in curriculum development, research with societal relevance, community outreach, and ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture of responsibility within universities.

As HEIs continue to navigate the complex landscape of social responsibility, faculties must be empowered and supported in their efforts to champion USR initiatives. Recognizing and celebrating faculty contributions to USR is essential, and institutions should provide resources, incentives, and professional development opportunities to further enhance their engagement in this area.

Ultimately, the collaborative efforts of faculties, university administrators, and other stakeholders are essential for creating a more socially responsible higher education ecosystem. As academic guardians, faculties help ensure that HEIs fulfil their moral and ethical obligations to society, producing graduates who are not only academically proficient but also socially conscious and committed to addressing the challenges of our ever-changing world. In doing so, they play a vital role in shaping the future of both higher education and society at large.

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