

University Social Responsibility and perceived value in students of Higher Education Institutions

Responsabilidad Social Universitaria y valor percibido en estudiantes de Instituciones de Educación Superior

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Abstract

University Social Responsibility places universities as centers of knowledge and promotion of ethical values, challenging them to take an active role in solving social problems. The research aimed to analyze the effect of MSW on the assessment made by university students of their educational experience, so a documentary review approach was adopted and content analysis was used. The documents examined were obtained from the Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo and Google Scholar databases. A selection criterion was applied that resulted in the identification of nineteen studies. The results allowed to identify three categories of analysis: a) Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches in the Definition and Conceptualization of University Social Responsibility, b) Influence of University Social

Responsibility on the Perception of Educational Experience and c) Current dynamics and challenges in the research of University Social Responsibility in Higher Education. It is concluded that University Social Responsibility plays a fundamental role in the perception of the educational experience by university students, influencing the quality of teaching, the active participation of students and their sense of belonging to the academic community.

Keywords: Social responsibility, university students, higher education, academic community

Resumen

La Responsabilidad Social Universitaria sitúa a las universidades como centros de conocimiento y promoción de valores éticos, desafiándolas a asumir un papel activo en la solución de problemas sociales. La investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar el efecto de la RSU en la valoración que hacen los estudiantes universitarios de su experiencia educativa, por lo que se adoptó un enfoque de revisión documental y se empleó el análisis de contenido. Los documentos examinados se obtuvieron de las bases de datos Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo y Google Scholar. Se aplicó un criterio de selección que resultó en la identificación de diecinueve estudios. Los resultados permitieron identificar tres categorías de análisis: a) Perspectivas y Enfoques Teóricos en la Definición y Conceptualización de la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria, b) Influencia de la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria en la Percepción de la Experiencia Educativa y c) Dinámicas actuales y retos en la investigación de la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria en Educación Superior. Se concluye que, la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria desempeña un papel fundamental en la percepción de la experiencia educativa por parte de los estudiantes universitarios, ejerciendo influencia en la calidad de la enseñanza, la participación activa de los estudiantes y su sentido de pertenencia a la comunidad académica.

Palabras clave: Responsabilidad social, estudiantes universitarios, educación superior, comunidad académica

Introduction

In the realm of higher education, a scenario of notable complexity and dynamism unfolds. Higher education institutions, recognized as strongholds of knowledge transmission and academic training, find themselves immersed in a reality characterized by increasing global interconnectedness, a constant demand for innovation, and society's growing expectations for their active involvement in addressing contemporary challenges (Gomez et al., 2018). These trends not only reflect a shift in social expectations but also signal an evolution in the role that universities must assume to remain relevant and effective in shaping future leaders.

In this context of continuous evolution, higher education stands at a crossroads, where its fundamental role in the holistic development of individuals and the construction of a more promising future is being questioned. It is within this scenario of inquiry and transformation that University Social Responsibility (USR) emerges, positioning itself as a guiding light in the search for an educational purpose that transcends the boundaries of the classroom. This self-reflection and evolution within universities have a profound impact on society, which is in a constant state of change (Marco et al., 2018). The transformative role of USR highlights the need for universities to not only be centers of knowledge but also active agents of social change.

Consequently, this dynamic and complex environment compels higher education institutions to rethink their educational approach and their relationship with society. USR emerges as a paradigm that not only acknowledges the central role of universities in knowledge acquisition but also emphasizes their responsibility in promoting ethical values and actively participating in addressing social challenges. This ever-evolving concept has become a fundamental axis in the strategies of many academic institutions (Forero-Jiménez, 2019). Integrating USR into the core of university strategies means adopting a holistic vision that values both academic success and social impact.

USR, at its core, entails a redefinition of higher education. It is not limited to the academic and professional training of students but also focuses on shaping engaged and responsible citizens. This translates into a series of tangible actions, such as volunteer programs, collaboration with local communities, and the integration of ethical principles into teaching and research (Valdés Pérez & Villegas Rodríguez, 2017). By embracing this redefinition, universities can create educational environments that not only prepare students for their future careers but also empower them to become active agents of change in their communities.

The influence of USR on students' perceptions is a crucial area of research, as it could provide valuable insights into how social responsibility-oriented activities and programs affect the educational experience. USR seeks not only to transform institutions but also to impact those who are part of them, including students. The way students perceive and value USR could significantly influence their identity as responsible citizens and their motivation to actively participate in society (Condori & Reyna, 2019). Understanding these perceptions is essential for designing USR programs that truly resonate with students and maximize their transformative potential.

As these interconnections are explored, the need for multidimensional research becomes evident. This research article aims to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between USR and

the perceived value among students in higher education institutions. By analyzing this complex dynamic, it is possible to shed light on how USR is shaping the educational experience and students' perceptions, which, in turn, may have significant implications for the future of higher education and its commitment to society.

The justification for this study on USR and the perceived value among students in higher education institutions lies in the growing relevance that USR has gained in the higher education landscape. USR provides students with a unique opportunity to engage in activities and projects that go beyond mere knowledge acquisition, allowing them to actively contribute to the construction of more just and sustainable communities (Macías Vilela & Bastidas Vaca, 2019).

However, despite advancements in the implementation of USR in educational institutions, uncertainties and gaps persist regarding its real impact on students' perceptions and engagement. The need for a deeper understanding of how USR influences the assessment of the educational experience and students' willingness to engage in solving social challenges is evident. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a solid foundation for decision-making in higher education and to promote a more effective approach to the implementation of USR, benefiting both institutions and students.

Given the aforementioned, it is crucial to understand how USR influences students' perceptions of their educational experience in higher education institutions. Various studies have indicated that proper implementation of USR can enhance the quality of teaching, increase student participation, and strengthen the sense of belonging to the academic community. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of USR on university students' evaluation of their educational experience.

Methodology

In this study, a documentary review was chosen as the research method. In this process, content analysis was used as a fundamental strategy for generating knowledge (Martín López, 1963). The selection of this technique is based on its suitability for exploratory research of this nature, as it allows for the identification of patterns and trends in the existing literature on University Social Responsibility (USR) and its relationship with students' assessment of their educational experience. However, it is acknowledged that this approach has inherent limitations, as it does not collect first-hand data. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as an initial approximation that provides a general and indicative overview.

2.1. Documentary Review Procedure

To conduct the research, information was gathered from recognized academic databases such as Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, and Google Scholar. These databases are widely used in the academic community due to their access to a broad range of peer-reviewed documents, which generally ensures a certain level of quality and academic rigor in the published studies.

2.2. Document Search and Retrieval

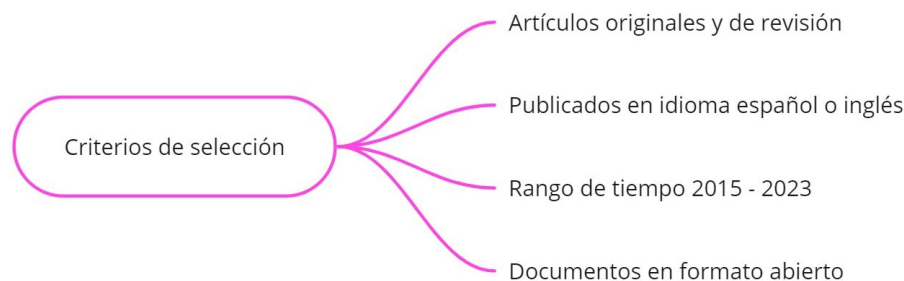
The initial search was conducted in October 2023, using a combination of keywords relevant to USR and student perception. The keywords included terms such as "University Social Responsibility," "assessment of the educational experience," "impact of USR," among others. This search yielded a total of one hundred and thirty scientific articles.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To refine the results and select the most relevant documents, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. These criteria were designed to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies. Certain characteristics, presented in Figure 1, were considered to determine the inclusion of studies.

Figure 1.

Criteria for the inclusion of documents



2.4. Systematization and Selection of Documents

Subsequently, a systematization of the identified documents was carried out. This stage involved reviewing the abstracts and, when necessary, the full content of the articles to assess their relevance and quality based on the established criteria. This process resulted in the selection of nineteen (n=19) documents that met all criteria and were deemed suitable for the review.

2.4. Content Analysis

After identifying, organizing, and structuring the selected documents, an analysis was conducted using qualitative research methods. This analysis focused on identifying units of meaning by searching for keywords and recurring themes. To carry out this analysis, specialized online tools were used to facilitate the coding and categorization of qualitative data. The content analysis allowed for the extraction of relevant patterns and trends, providing a deeper understanding of how USR impacts students' perceptions in higher education institutions. This approach not only helped identify the most discussed aspects in the literature but also highlighted areas that require further attention and development in future research.

Results

The results led to the selection of 19 publications, detailed in Table 1, organized by:

- a. Year of publication,
- b. Author/year,
- c. Database, and
- d. Methodology used.

This table presents the documents analyzed in this review. Additionally, Figure 2 illustrates the identification of a set of keywords that were essential in discerning the units of meaning that supported the review. This, in turn, facilitated the creation of three categories of analysis, which are detailed below.

Table 1.

Corpus of reviewed documents

N°	Author/Year	Database	Methodology
1	Salehi & Monavvarifard (2022)	Google Scholar	Mixed
2	Andia Valencia et al. (2021)	SciELO	Documentary review with qualitative analysis
3	Espitia Cubillos et al. (2020)	Google Scholar	Mixed
4	Rubio-Rodríguez et al. (2020)	Redalyc	Mixed
5	Bolio Domínguez & Pinzón Lizarraga (2019)	Scopus	Mixed
6	Condori & Reyna (2019)	SciELO / Google Scholar	Descriptive quantitative
7	Duque & Cervantes-Cervantes (2019)	SciELO	Bibliometric analysis
8	Macías Vilela & Bastidas Vaca (2019)	Redalyc	Quantitative
9	Pumacayo Palomino et al. (2019)	Google Scholar	Quantitative
10	Ostos Ortiz & Cortés Gallego (2019)	Redalyc	Prospective analytical
11	Forero-Jiménez (2019)	SciELO	Descriptive analytical qualitative
12	Naranjo Africano & Mejía Reatiga (2018)	Scopus	Documentary review
13	Vallaeys (2018)	SciELO	Qualitative, critical analytical
14	Marco et al. (2018)	Google Scholar	Mixed
15	Gómez et al. (2018)	Redalyc	Quantitative
16	Valdés Pérez & Villegas Rodríguez (2017)	SciELO	Documentary review
17	Gaete Quezada (2015a)	SciELO	Hermeneutic qualitative
18	Gaete Quezada (2015b)	SciELO	Hermeneutic qualitative
19	Ramallo (2015)	Redalyc	Qualitative

Keywords for the creation of categories



Before analyzing the theoretical perspectives on the definition and conceptualization of University Social Responsibility (USR), it is essential to acknowledge that this topic has become a central subject of discussion and reflection in academia over recent decades. The growing relevance of USR is attributed to the increasing awareness that universities play a crucial role in shaping citizens and promoting social well-being. However, what defines and constitutes USR varies significantly depending on the theoretical perspective from which it is approached. Three key perspectives emerge in this context:

- Each of these perspectives provides a unique understanding of USR and its role in higher education.

From an ethical and philosophical standpoint, USR is conceived as a moral imperative for higher education institutions. This perspective argues that universities have an intrinsic obligation to contribute to societal well-being by fostering the education of ethical and responsible citizens. In this approach, USR is seen as a fundamental commitment to social justice and equity. Essentially, it implies that universities cannot merely focus on imparting academic knowledge and skills; they must also take an active role in promoting ethical values and fostering a more equitable social environment (Espitia Cubillos et al., 2020).

On the other hand, from a pragmatic and market-oriented perspective, USR is interpreted as a strategy to enhance the reputation and competitiveness of educational institutions. According to this view, universities adopt socially responsible practices as a means to attract students, funding, and industry collaborations. Here, USR is associated with value creation and competitive advantages (Gaete Quezada, 2015a).

In this sense, USR becomes a strategic tool for academic institutions in a highly competitive environment. Universities recognize that social responsibility is not only a moral imperative but also a competitive advantage in attracting students and financial resources. The adoption of socially responsible policies and practices can enhance the institution's image, leading to increased enrollment and attracting academic and financial talent. Additionally, collaboration with industry and other social actors in USR projects can open new funding opportunities and strengthen ties with the business sector (Gaete Quezada, 2015a). However, this perspective also raises important questions about the authenticity of USR actions—whether they are merely part of a public relations strategy or genuinely reflect a commitment to society.

A third perspective, more focused on pedagogy and competency development, highlights USR as an opportunity for the development of skills and values in young people. From this viewpoint, USR is considered a means to engage students in projects and activities that foster leadership skills, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving, thus enriching their educational experience. This pedagogical perspective views USR as a powerful vehicle for holistic student formation. It is not just about imparting academic knowledge but also about providing students with the opportunity to apply that knowledge in real-world contexts. Through USR projects, students can develop leadership skills as they take active roles in planning and executing social initiatives (Tobón Marulanda et al., 2019). Teamwork is strengthened as they collaborate with peers and community members to solve concrete problems. Empathy and understanding of others' needs are cultivated through direct interaction with project beneficiaries. Additionally, the ability to address complex social challenges fosters the development of critical and reflective students.

These perspectives, though diverse, are not mutually exclusive and often intertwine in the understanding of USR. As evidenced in this category, USR is recognized as a multifaceted concept encompassing ethical, strategic, and pedagogical dimensions. The various theoretical perspectives that frame it highlight its complexity and adaptability to the needs and objectives of academic institutions. This conceptual richness provides fertile ground for reflection and research, such as the one presented in this study. By understanding these perspectives and theoretical approaches, we can shed light on how USR influences students' perceptions and how it contributes to their formation as engaged and competent citizens.

3.2. Influence of University Social Responsibility on the Perception of the Educational Experience

This new category of analysis focuses on investigating how USR affects students' perception of their educational experience. As a concept that seeks the active commitment of higher education institutions to addressing social challenges, USR can have a profound impact on how students

evaluate their academic training. This category aims to understand how students perceive and assess the influence of USR on their educational experience, considering aspects that go beyond acquiring knowledge and skills.

The assessment of the educational experience encompasses various aspects, such as teaching quality, sense of belonging to the academic community, development of practical skills, preparation for professional life, and, increasingly, awareness of social responsibility. In this regard, the study will analyze how the presence and participation of institutions in USR activities affect students' perceptions in these key areas.

First, teaching quality plays a crucial role in students' perception of their educational experience. Students seek not only to receive accurate and up-to-date information but also effective teaching methods that promote deep understanding and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations. USR positively influences teaching quality by promoting innovative pedagogical approaches that integrate the social dimension into the learning process. This results in greater student interest and improved retention of the concepts taught (Pumacayo Palomino et al., 2019).

Additionally, USR acts as a catalyst for students' active participation in their educational process. When students engage in USR projects that address relevant social issues, they become protagonists of their own learning. This active participation not only allows them to apply classroom knowledge but also provides them with a sense of purpose and relevance in their education. The experience of tackling real-world challenges through USR motivates students to commit more deeply to their academic training and to view it as a tool for positive change in society (Gaete Quezada, 2015b).

Together, the influence of USR on teaching quality and students' active participation significantly enriches their educational experience. This pedagogical approach, centered on the practical application of knowledge and community contribution, leads to graduates who are better prepared and socially responsible, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

The sense of belonging to the academic community is another relevant aspect. Students value feeling part of an educational community that not only focuses on knowledge transmission but also on their well-being and personal development. USR strengthens this sense of belonging by offering opportunities to engage in projects and activities that have a tangible impact on society. Students participating in USR initiatives often feel more connected to their institution and to a broader purpose in their education (Andia Valencia et al., 2021).

The development of practical skills is essential for professional life preparation. Students seek to acquire skills that are directly applicable to their future careers. USR facilitates this process by providing opportunities to work in real-world settings and address concrete challenges. For example, participating in USR projects that tackle social issues helps students develop problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, and communication skills—highly valued by employers (Marco et al., 2018).

Furthermore, USR connects students with professionals and organizations outside the academic sphere, giving them the opportunity to learn from real-world experiences and establish networks that can be beneficial for their future careers. This interaction with the external world also helps students understand how their academic knowledge and skills apply in practical situations and how they can contribute to overall societal well-being (Forero-Jiménez, 2019). In this sense, USR not only enriches students' education but also enhances their employability and ability to tackle professional challenges effectively.

Preparation for professional life is a fundamental goal of higher education. Students aim not only to obtain a degree but also to be prepared for the challenges and responsibilities of their future careers. USR plays a crucial role by offering experiences that link theory with practice and help students understand how they can meaningfully contribute to society through their future professional roles (Gómez et al., 2018).

In conclusion, these aspects are intertwined in students' evaluation of their educational experience in higher education institutions. By influencing these key elements, USR can have a profound impact on how students perceive and value their academic training and their preparation to contribute to society.

3.3. Current Dynamics and Challenges in Research on University Social Responsibility in Higher Education

In the analysis of current dynamics and emerging challenges in research on University Social Responsibility (USR), several trends stand out that affect both the perception and the experience of students in higher education. As USR has gained prominence in the academic and social spheres, significant changes have occurred in how it is approached and understood in educational research.

One of the most notable developments is the growth in the production of studies on USR, reflecting the increasing relevance of the topic. Researchers from various disciplines have engaged in interdisciplinary studies to delve deeper into how USR influences students and how universities can promote it more effectively. This boom in research has been accompanied by greater methodological diversity, encompassing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches, as well as international comparative studies. These efforts contribute to a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of USR (Duque & Cervantes-Cervantes, 2019).

Collaboration between educational institutions and external organizations has also increased, enriching both the approaches to and the implementation of USR. By working with NGOs, businesses, and local governments, a more holistic approach to social and environmental challenges is encouraged. However, this intersectoral interaction also faces challenges in terms of coherence and coordination among the various actors involved in USR initiatives (Gaete Quezada, 2015b).

Despite these advances, significant challenges remain in the definition and measurement of USR. The wide range of activities and practices encompassed by USR makes it difficult to establish clear indicators and evaluation tools that measure its impact on students and the community.

Additionally, the lack of consensus on the objectives and expected outcomes complicates the comparison of studies conducted in different contexts. The lack of clarity regarding expectations and desired outcomes can lead to a fragmented and uneven implementation of USR within the same institution (Ramallo, 2015).

Another key challenge in USR research is the sustainability and continuity of the initiatives. While many universities have begun to integrate USR into their activities, maintaining long-term institutional commitment remains a major concern. To ensure that USR initiatives are not isolated or short-lived, sustainability strategies are being developed, such as the creation of institutional policies that support USR on an ongoing basis. The integration of USR into the academic curriculum and collaboration with external organizations are key approaches to ensuring that USR activities have a lasting impact (Andia Valencia et al., 2021).

In addition to sustainability, another organizational challenge is the need for the deep integration of University Social Responsibility (USR) into institutional culture and structure. For USR to have a significant and lasting impact, universities must transform their structures and decision-making processes. This includes the creation of dedicated committees, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the incorporation of USR into the universities' long-term strategic plans (Vallaes, 2018). The active involvement of universities in USR projects that engage multiple departments facilitates a collaborative and enriching approach to addressing social issues from various perspectives (Ostos Ortiz & Cortés Gallego, 2019).

Moreover, the increasing diversity of students presents an additional challenge in the implementation of USR. Students come from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds, making it necessary to develop strategies to ensure that USR initiatives are inclusive and accessible. Some of these strategies include personalizing USR activities by adapting them to the specific needs of students and promoting their active participation in project design. It is also important to provide additional resources and support to students who face barriers to participating in these initiatives, such as financial limitations or disabilities (Bolio Domínguez & Pinzón Lizarraga, 2019).

Finally, research on USR in higher education is marked by the need for a collaborative approach involving both academic and external stakeholders. USR should not be seen merely as an educational supplement, but as a fundamental component capable of transforming university education and significantly contributing to the resolution of social and environmental problems in the surrounding environment.

Conclusions

The research carried out has enabled a deeper understanding of the relationship between University Social Responsibility (USR) and students' valuation of their educational experience in higher education. Through a documentary review, a variety of perspectives and theoretical approaches regarding the definition and conceptualization of USR in this context have been analyzed, revealing the richness and complexity of this concept. The plurality of approaches reflects the diversity of perspectives adopted by educational institutions, ranging from those that view USR as an extension

of the educational function to broader approaches that consider the university's overall contribution to society.

One of the most significant findings is the positive impact of USR on students' perception of their educational experience. The documentary review shows that USR can enhance various aspects of students' academic life, including the quality of teaching, student engagement, and the strengthening of their sense of belonging to the university community. Although these observations should be interpreted with caution due to the limitations of the methodological approach, the patterns identified in the literature suggest that the effective integration of USR into higher education institutions can significantly enrich students' educational experience and foster active citizenship.

However, despite the progress observed, the research also identifies persistent challenges in the implementation of USR. The need for a clear definition and an effective measurement system remains an obstacle to consistently consolidating USR. In addition, the long-term sustainability of USR initiatives poses another major challenge. Nevertheless, a promising path is emerging toward the integration of USR as an essential component of higher education, driven by universities' commitment to creating clear institutional policies, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and ensuring the active participation of all stakeholders involved.

The personalized approach to USR, which considers the diversity of students and their varying needs, has also been identified as a crucial element to ensure equity and accessibility in these initiatives. By adapting USR programs and considering students' particular circumstances, it is possible to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage in activities that promote social commitment and contribute to the development of responsible citizenship.

In summary, the research reaffirms the importance of USR as a key element in higher education—not only to improve academic quality, but also to foster a more just and engaged society. The effective and sustainable implementation of USR, supported by a robust institutional framework, can be a powerful tool to strengthen both students' educational experience and their role in the community.

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