Social Responsibility: a commitment of Higher Education institutions

Responsabilidad Social: un compromiso de las instituciones de Educación Superior

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Abstract

This article addresses the importance of the criterion of commitment to social responsibility in higher education, highlighting the essential form of which it is a part. It focuses on the methodology used in an analysis carried out in a Higher Education Unit in Northern Mexico, evaluating academic programs through the criteria set forth by the National System for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (SEAES) in terms of commitment to social responsibility. The results reveal that the strongest point is the Master's level programs, standing out for the number of programs related to the field of social responsibility. This analysis concludes by revealing the relevance of the commitment to social responsibility in higher education degrees.

Resumen

En el presente artículo se aborda la importancia del criterio de compromiso de responsabilidad social en la educación superior, destacando la forma esencial de la que forma parte. Se enfoca en la metodología utilizada en un análisis realizado en una Dependencia de Educación Superior del Norte del México, evaluando los programas académicos a través de los criterios que plantea el Sistema Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior (SEAES) en términos de compromiso de Responsabilidad Social. A través de los resultados se revela que el punto más fuerte son los programas realizados a nivel Maestría, destacándose por la cantidad de programas relacionados con el ámbito de Responsabilidad Social. Este análisis concluye develando la relevancia del compromiso de Responsabilidad Social en grados de educación superior.

Social Responsibility: a commitment of Higher Education institutions		
Objectives	Metodology	Contribution

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Objetivos	Metodología	Contribución

Commitment, Social Responsibility, Academic Programs

Evaluación, Responsabilidad Social, Programas Académicos

Article

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in the education of responsible citizens who are aware of their environment. Through various methods of study and research, a culture of social responsibility can be fostered that has a positive impact.

By conducting an analysis in a higher education institution in the north of the country, data was collected on one of the seven indicators (commitment to social responsibility, social and gender equity, inclusion, excellence, social innovation, vanguard and interculturality) proposed by the National System of Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (SEAES) belonging to the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico, at educational levels such as bachelor, specialty, master and doctorate. The evaluation carried out has been fundamental for the revelation of how the institutions carry out their programmes of commitment to Social Responsibility.

For this purpose, the evaluation exercise was carried out in HEIs with related programmes in accordance with the criteria set out by the SEAES.

Background

Social Responsibility is a concept that has gained great relevance in various spheres of society, with greater emphasis on the educational sector, focusing this analysis on higher education. The university has a great task to carry out, and it is related to offering an integral education to its students, raising its interest in the teaching of values, in terms of personal and professional ethics and Social Responsibility (SR). (Pegalajar, 2021) Likewise, this analysis shows how Social Responsibility has evolved as a response to the growing demand for HEIs to contribute to the development of professionals in the context of what is happening in the world.

Theoretical framework

Over the years, the relevance of higher education has increased with a series of reforms, programmes and policies designed to enhance and improve quality. The following is a timeline highlighting the importance of HEI evaluation.

Box 1
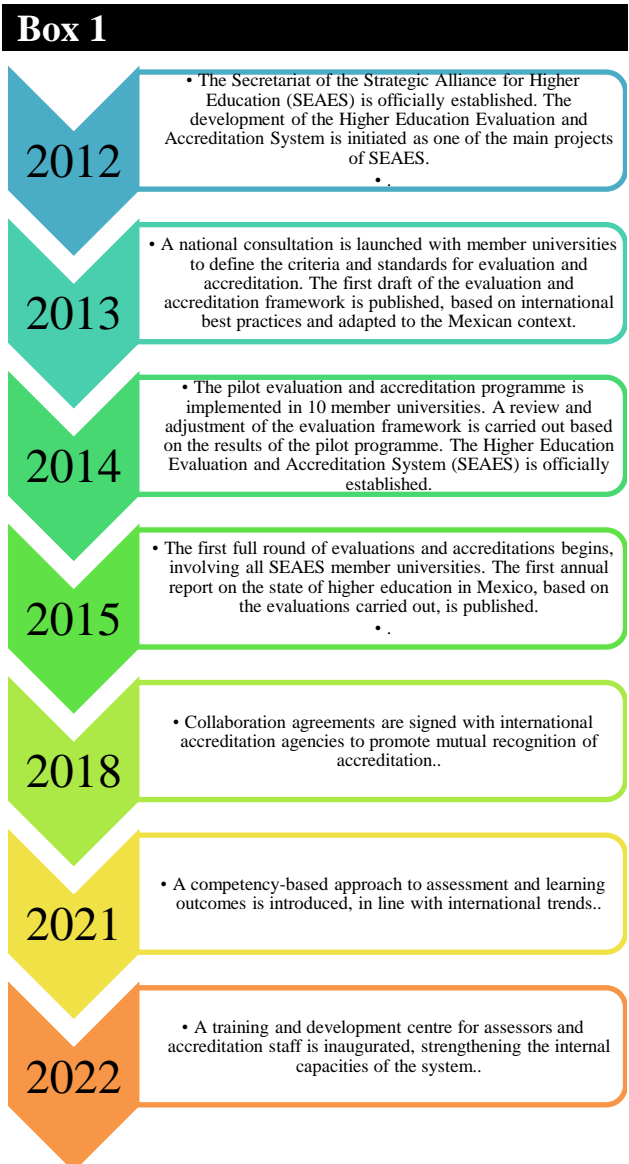
Figure 1

Timeline of the National System of Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education

In this way, the changes and reforms imposed by the SEAES have generated criteria that achieve a significant improvement in the field of higher education.

The constant development of citizenship, as well as the exponential growth of industry, has meant that Social Responsibility in education implies a reinforcement of its contribution to the development and welfare of the society in which young professionals are in the process of training.

According to SEAES (2023) it states that:

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Article

The criterion of commitment to Social Responsibility refers to the way in which the institution assumes its responsibility and social leadership in its own context and the most sensitive problems of the surrounding communities, with the aim of contributing to the creation of a more just, free, inclusive and peaceful society, as well as to sustainable development and care for the environment, at local, regional and national level; and to the preservation, enrichment and dissemination of the goods and values of the various cultures and with solidarity-based internationalisation. (...) The commitment to the Social Responsibility of higher education must be evaluated in terms of the adequacy between what society expects of institutions and what they do (...). Social Responsibility is based on the urgency of incorporating a social-ethical perspective as a framework for decision-making in all higher education activities, so that the values, principles and norms that guide them are subject to critical reflection and collective deliberation. It requires assuming that the fundamental mission of higher education is to serve society and its sustainable future, i.e. the search for well-being, equity, justice, peace, freedom and care for the environment, among other current challenges (CONACES, 2022: p. 55-56).

The purpose of USR is to promote in students, as well as in the academic and administrative staff of each institution, the commitment to form generations with empathy and concern for the good of society (González Ibarra, A. N., Palomares Ruíz, M. B. E. & Torres Bugdud, A., 2022, p. 125).

On the other hand, Kyambade et al. (2024) represent that:

'Broadly speaking socially responsible leadership as a multi-level phenomenon involving individuals, groups and organizations that emphasises leadership effectiveness, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholders, and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable practices'.

Furthermore, HEIs have a responsibility to generate knowledge through research and innovation, creating future professionals who have an active perspective of their responsibility towards their environment with ethical and civic values.

"It consists of fulfilling the duty to assume the consequences of one's actions; it is also trying to ensure that actions are carried out in accordance with a notion of justice and the fulfilment of duty in all senses". (Antúnez & Martínez, 2010)

"Social responsibility means producing knowledge, training professionals and creating culture for the reality in which an educational institution is actively inserted. For this reason, the university must not only look outwards; it must rethink itself from within" (Días cited by Baca, 2015, p. 85).

In this aspect of engagement in the face of the adversities that may arise in such an uncertain future, it is necessary for young people to be aware of the constant change they face and to take responsibility for it.

The main role of the university is to develop the functions of teaching, research and Social Responsibility; this allows to create a broader vision of the needs in the community generating competent professionals and causing positive impact on the environment and society (Pumacayo, Calla, Yangali, Vasquez, Arrátia & Rodríguez, 2020).

As Garbizo Flores, Noraida, Ordaz Fernández, Mayra, & Hernández Martín, Juan Carlos (2021) express:

University Social Responsibility, in its inescapable nexus with educational work, is revealed as a necessary relationship in the training of integral professionals, based on the assumption of criteria and indicators that are expressed in the ethical, organizational, environmental, social and knowledge dimensions, which in their integration allow the university institution to become visible as a scenario of transformation par excellence and centre where the training of professionals, citizens and people converge.

University Social Responsibility is also revealed as "a new philosophy of university management that aims to renew the social commitment of the university and facilitate innovative solutions to the challenges facing higher education in the context of a globalised but unsustainable world in its patterns of development" (Valleys, 2014, p.3).

In this regard, Gaete (2015) expresses: "A socially responsible university, from my point of view, is one that seeks to develop all its products, whether at the level of research, links with the environment or training of professionals in a real assimilation or coincidence with the needs of the region or territory where the university is located" (p.100). In accordance with the above, the concept of Social Responsibility can be understood from different points of view, and finally, each human being must be aware of the consequences of their actions.

Methodology

In conducting this analysis, quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to capture the complexity of the aspect of commitment to Social Responsibility in terms of criteria provided by SEAES. The approach ensures an effective understanding of the results presented in the indicators that show the findings in this area and allow for a deeper interpretation of the related trend.

Results

On the basis of the above-mentioned concept of Social Responsibility in a HEI in Northern Mexico, indicators were developed based on one of the seven areas of SEAES, in this case the area of commitment to Social Responsibility. Three criteria were grouped in the graphs to classify the programmes related to the area of Social Responsibility: programmes as part of the formally approved curriculum, internal programmes but independent of the curriculum and external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile carried out by external entities); this with the objective of identifying which of these criteria predominates over the other academic grades. Through the data collection, **Figure 2** shows the 145 programmes related to the Social Responsibility criteria according to the SEAES at undergraduate level; where section A stands out with 72 programmes as part of the formally approved curriculum, section B shows 30 internal but independent programmes from the curriculum and section C contains the 43 external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile carried out by external entities), and section C contains the 43 external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile carried out by external entities).

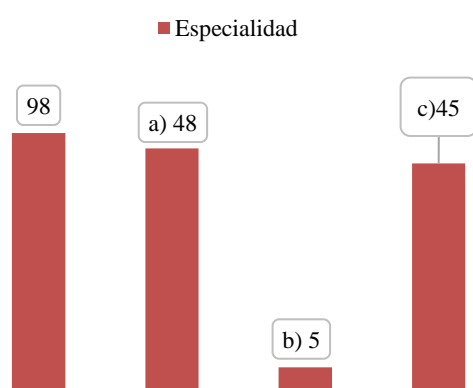**Box 2**

Undergraduate programmes
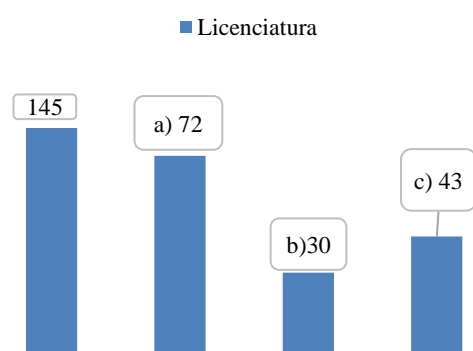
Figure 2
Undergraduate Social Responsibility Engagement Programmes

Subsequently, **Figure 3** shows the total of 98 total programmes on Social Responsibility at specialty level, showing a priority in item A with 48 programmes as part of the formally approved curriculum, in item B a total of 5 internal but independent programmes of the curriculum and finally item C with 45 external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile made by external entities), and in item C with 45 external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile made by external entities, such as the evaluation of the traits of the graduate profile made by external entities).

Box 3

Speciality Programmes

Figure 3
Social Responsibility Commitment Programmes at Speciality level

Palomares-Ruiz, María Blanca Elizabeth, Torres-Bugdud, Arturo, Treviño-Cubero, Arnulfo and Báez-Villarreal, Esteban. Social Responsibility: a commitment of Higher Education institutions. Journal of Business and SMEs. 2024. 10-26:20-25.
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In **Figure 4**, with the Social Responsibility programmes at Master's level, there are a total of 198 programmes, standing out above the other academic levels, with 87 programmes in section A as part of the formally approved curriculum, 53 internal programmes in section B but independent of the curriculum and 58 external programmes in section C (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile carried out by external entities).

Box 4

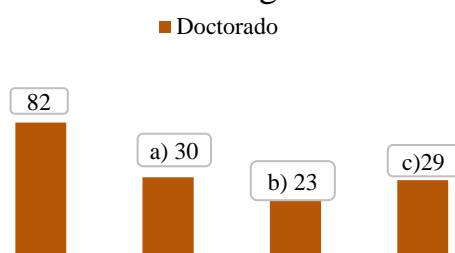### Master's Programmes

■ Maestría
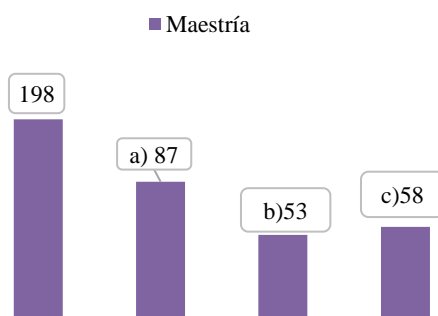
Figure 4

Commitment to Social Responsibility Programmes at Master's level

Finally, the programmes related to Social Responsibility at doctoral level reflected in Figure 5 were analysed, giving a total of 82 programmes where item A obtained 30 programmes as part of the formally approved curriculum, item B by 23 internal programmes but independent of the curriculum and item C by 29 external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile carried out by external entities), and item C by 29 external programmes (evaluations of the achievement of the traits of the graduate profile carried out by external entities).

Box 5

Doctoral Programmes

■ Doctorado

Figure 5

Commitment to Social Responsibility Programmes at Doctorate level

Conclusions

On the basis of the results obtained, the programmes of commitment to social responsibility at the bachelor's, master's, specialist, master's and doctoral levels of education are highlighted on the basis of the SEAES criteria.

As part of the analysis, it was highlighted that at master's level there are 198 programmes on Social Responsibility with the SEAES criteria. These data reflect that, although there is a commitment to social responsibility at all levels of education, there are significant variations in the number and type of programmes offered.

Finally, the analysis fulfils the function of verifying the HEI's commitment to Social Responsibility, while not neglecting the necessary improvement at each level and not downplaying the importance of the most outstanding level to what has been achieved today.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. They have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that might have appeared to influence the article reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution

Palomares-Ruiz, María Blanca Elizabeth: Contributed to the project idea, research method and technique.

Torres-Bugdud, Arturo: Contributed to the project idea, research method and technique.

Treviño-Cubero, Arnulfo: Contributed to the project idea, research method and technique.

Báez-Villarreal, Esteban: Contributed to the project idea, research method and technique.

Availability of data and materials

Public domain.

Abbreviations

CONACES	National Council for the Co-ordination of Higher Education
IES	Higher Education Institutions
SEAES	Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation System
SEP	Secretary of Public Education
RS	Social Responsibility

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