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## Article

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## University social responsibility: The role of teachers

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### ABSTRACT

In the last decades, the social impact of universities has arisen as a new concern, which has shifted the way academic knowledge is designed to include topics such as inclusion, environmental protection, ethics, and so on. Being teachers the main actors of these changes, it is necessary to understand their beliefs and practices regarding this matter. This study aims to analyze the perception and curricular practices of higher education teachers of business-related subjects regarding University Social Responsibility (USR). A sample of twenty-one university teachers related to socially relevant subjects in business degrees was selected to answer a questionnaire about their perceptions and practices regarding USR. In general, the findings indicate that teachers are not fully aware of the role of social topics in their subjects, and do not engage their students in these matters within their subjects. In addition, teachers do not fully perceive actions of social responsibility taken by the university. This diagnostic study may enable future changes in curricular practices and teacher training that will allow students to receive a complete education about social issues related to their professional development.

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### Introduction

In the corporate world, being environmental, social, and governance (ESG) compliant or having a positive corporate social responsibility policy has become a key factor toward innovation and social change. Following the same trend, in recent years, the practical social element of universities has arisen as a new field of concern. As stated by Sanz, Peris and Escámez (2017), higher education must be active in the global and local spheres with respect to justice and sustainability. That means that the role of the university has developed beyond the simple production and dissemination of knowledge; the responsibility of higher education institutions is, increasingly, to exercise their role as an engine of social transformation and growth, serving the different individual and social needs of a world that is increasingly aware of its diversity (Pérez Domínguez, 2009). Such change has resulted in the concept of university social responsibility, henceforth university social responsibility (USR). This is a broad undertaking that encompasses both the university's activity toward students and employees and the wider society beyond, integrating procedures of social responsibility in its administration and delivering innovative

education, knowledge production, services, and community activities (Shek, Yuen-Tsang, & Ng, 2017, p. 13).

Many of these activities are performed by university teachers, who play a crucial role in achieving USR by being one of the stakeholders that can include up-to-date, socially relevant content and practices in their courses and demand a more socially aware campus. To that end, it is deemed necessary to understand their perceptions and practices and identify areas for improvement as a first step toward a complete and sustainable USR practice.

Therefore, this study aims to address the perceptions and practices regarding USR by teachers in a private business and marketing university in Madrid (Spain). First, we aim to explore and understand teachers' perceptions of the university's social practices, anticipating a positive outlook among educators. Second, our focus extends to teachers involved in subjects that incorporate social issues, to examine their efforts to integrate socially relevant topics into their curriculum. Lastly, we seek to assess the awareness and commitment of teachers engaged in subjects featuring social topics, emphasizing their recognition of the necessity to keep up to date and well-informed about the evolving needs of society. With these objectives, we aim to gain insights into the dynamics of teachers' responses to and involvement in the university's social initiatives.

The present research paper is structured as follows. The literature review section outlines the theoretical framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and USR and the hypothesis development. The

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third section describes the methodology deployed, including the methods and tools used. The fourth section presents the results of the research, and the fifth section discusses them. The final section offers the main conclusions and suggestions for future research.

### Literature review

#### Corporate social responsibility

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of CSR began to emerge as a result of changes in collective thinking toward greater social awareness. Companies are increasingly devoting resources to various social initiatives, ranging from community outreach and environmental protection to broader socially responsible business practices (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010, p.1). At the same time, CSR efforts are driven not only by the idea that business can be a powerful and positive force for social change but also by the multiple business benefits that companies can derive from their CSR efforts (ibid,1).

The Green Paper “Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility” (European Union, 2001) defines CSR as the cyclical relationship between companies and society, when businesses decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society, thereby responding to the expectations society has about business. Companies that practice their social responsibility go beyond profit, incorporating their moral and ethical responsibility toward the wider society and individuals into their business practices (Ali, Mustapha, Osman, & Hassan, 2021, p. 2). Nowadays, the term ESG, is becoming more prominent as it encompasses all fundamentals that impact a company’s performance in the social–economic sphere, including general governance, employment standards, human resources, and environmental practices (Harper Ho, 2016).

This effort toward addressing social responsibility culminated in the development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, the member states of the European Union approved the document “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (United Nations, 2015), to eradicate poverty and promote shared economic prosperity, social development, and environmental protection for all countries. The emergence of the SDGs has spurred various government entities into action, implementing strategies to compel the execution of initiatives that contribute to the global pursuit of sustainability or position their nations as exemplary in some respect (Castro, Zanello, Lizcano, & Daza, 2022).

#### University social responsibility

Several factors have led the concept of CSR to develop toward the emergent notion of USR at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

First, universities are undergoing dramatic changes as they have a responsibility to participate in society, not only in terms of their educational role but also because of their moral and ethical stance (Yao, Wang, Jiang, Li, & Li, 2022). The concept of USR comes from the need for universities to understand and address their roles and subsequent responsibilities within society. Universities, like any other corporation, are now required to promote the “social usefulness of knowledge” aiming to improve society’s quality of life (Shek et al., 2017, p. 13). The breadth of the concept has resulted in several terminologies that define the concept of USR in various contexts, although the variety of terms only derives from the specific aspects of how USR manifests itself (Esfijani, 2012).

The notion of USR is driven by society’s demand for higher education institutions to train more expert profiles that can perform in an increasingly competitive environment characterized by globalization, the unstructured development of the world economy, inequalities in social and population progress, advances in communication, and the rise of the learning society (Ali et al., 2021).

Likewise, in recent years, the increased competition in the university sector has forced universities to apply different types of

strategies to attract and retain students, among which is the application of CSR practices (Garde Sánchez, Rodríguez Bolívar, & López-Hernández, 2013). Thus, CSR in universities is related to the 17 SDGs, so all SDGs should be integrated into the institution and able to impact in a variety of ways in the service of society. The literature reflects the decisive role played by universities in the transformation of the social context, in terms of the not only advancement of science and the sharing of knowledge with and for society but also the empowerment of students through their exercise of active, inclusive, participatory, and democratic citizenship (Coelho & Menezes, 2021, p.2).

USR has been also defined as “a re-conceptualization of the university institution as a whole in the light of values, objectives, forms of management, and initiatives that imply a greater commitment to society and to contributing to a new, more balanced and sustainable model of development” (Comisión Técnica de la Estrategia Universidad 2015, 2011, p. 34).

Poff (2022, p. 18) states that USR provides a framework for how universities impact and relate to society, and, more specifically, what knowledge students need to have to address societal issues after graduation. Higher education has a major impact on the growth and development of the community, mainly achieved through the connection between the curriculum and the professional and social reality that their students will face after graduating (Pérez Domínguez, 2009, pp. 9, 10). As Wang, Li, Tian, Zakuan and Rani (2023) point out, transformations in society occur first and then are applied to current education cultures and systems, but sometimes without strategic initiatives ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning environments. It is important that the university as a whole considers the impact of its knowledge production and pedagogical strategies on its students, and how the latter are affected and become professionals and citizens “equipped with critical thinking abilities, and actively involved in social transformation” (Sanz et al., 2017). A study conducted in Costa Rica (Gaete Quezada, Álvarez Rodríguez, Gaete Quezada, & Álvarez Rodríguez, 2019) aimed to analyze the presence of the concept of university social responsibility in prominent examples used as promoters of USR in Latin American inter-university networks. The results indicate that USR should be included in institutional strategic plans. This inclusion will enable institutions to better guide their respective academic communities, clearly expressed in their corporate identity and integrated into institutional strategic plans, allowing for more effective guidance to be made available to their academic communities. Stratu-Strelet, Gil-Gómez, Oltra-Badenes, & Guerola-Navarro (2023) highlight the need in a democracy to educate students in the notions of participation, public commitment, and social responsibility. This agrees with Recommendation CM/Rec (2007) 6 adopted by the Council of Europe (2007), which states that one of the multiple purposes of higher education and research is the preparation of students for sustainable employment, for life as citizens, and for personal development. Given its complexity, the Council of Europe, in its Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018) created a model of competencies that students must acquire through the different educational institutions they belong to during their academic life. Among the 20 main competencies shown in Fig. 1, more than half are related to social responsibility.

Although USR has become one of the most important points of action of higher education institutions, there is a lack of empirical studies regarding the specifics of the practice of USR in universities. Despite the relevance of the topic worldwide, there is an uneven distribution of research on this matter. The main sources of discourse come from Latin America and Asia. For example, a study conducted at the National University Hermilio Valdizán of Huanuco, in Peru, was designed to understand the perspective of all its stakeholders, both internal and external, regarding USR (Céspedes Aguirre, 2019). It concluded that the university must overcome challenges, particularly

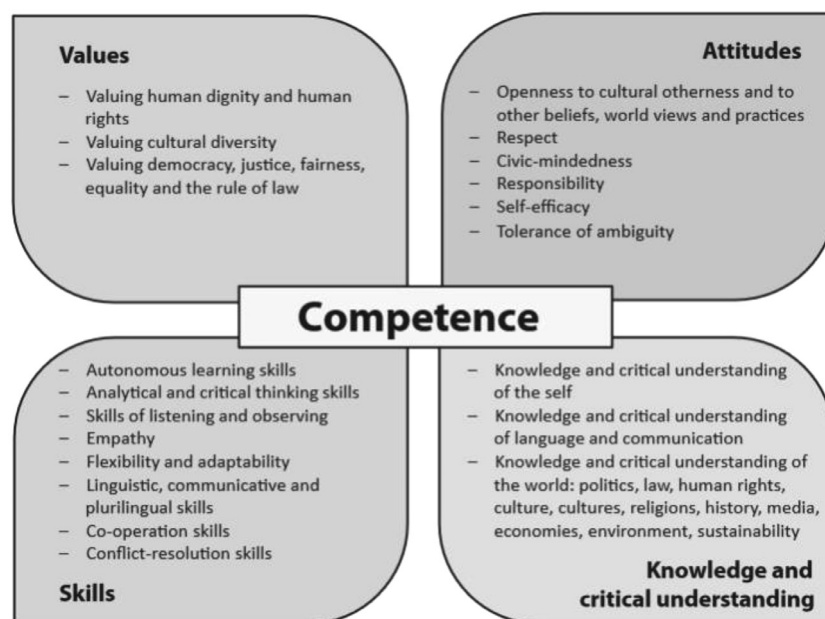


Fig. 1. The 20 competencies included in the competence model of the Council of Europe. Source: Council of Europe, 2008, page 38

those related to the limited accountability for its research and social engagement activities. Additionally, it was deemed crucial to innovate teaching strategies that foster stronger connections between students, faculty, and societal issues. Another study by [Shek et al. \(2017\)](#) focused on the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the University Social Responsibility Network established in 2015, with the participation of a total of 14 universities. Despite the efforts made, the authors highlight that a “systematic and rigorous evaluation of USR is enormously needed to demonstrate the impact of a higher level coordination at the policy level of higher education” (p. 19).

In Spain, few cases are available. One is the case study by [Fernández and Quintero \(2013\)](#). This article evaluates the measures taken by three institutions: the University of Santiago de Compostela, the International University of Andalusia, and the University of Malaga as representatives of the Spanish University System, formulating seven theoretical propositions and 35 research questions. Its general conclusions point to the fact that USR has been incorporated into their management systems, with no mention of its application in the curricular content of the universities analyzed. Other works have studied the impact that implementing socially responsible training can have on students. Arango [Arango Tobón, Clavijo Zapata, Puerta Lopera and Sánchez Duque \(2014\)](#) conducted quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive, and correlational research with 234 students to determine the relationship between academic training, empathy, values, and the socially responsible behaviors of students. The study concluded that academic training provides for the development and consolidation of socially responsible behaviors in the students, finding that the longer the time spent in the university, the greater the students' intentions to develop their knowledge and skills toward social responsibility, with major trends of socially responsible behaviors linked to labor responsibility, volunteer activities, social aid, civic responsibility and ecology/environment. They suggest that the university must create cross-curricular training in social responsibility to consolidate this profile through education in values that not only support the moral and ethical development of students but also articulate and complement the emotional and empathic development in the social dimension of future professionals. The purpose of this is to prepare them not only to describe, explain, and understand the complexities of society but also to generate significant changes by facing current problems that affect our socio-cultural environment and proposing strategies to help solve them.

Finally, recent studies that have analyzed undergraduates' perceptions of the potential impact of USR service-learning projects on their own academic, civic, and professional development, have concluded that their involvement in such projects produces changes not only in the way they conceive of their academic life but also in their role both inside and outside the university ([Coelho & Menezes, 2021](#)).

### Theoretical background and hypotheses

The USR model comprises four basic elements, as shown in [Fig. 2](#): a responsible campus, professional training, the social management of knowledge production, and social participation, which affect not only the management of the institution but also all its members ([Guasch Murillo & Hernández Galán, 2012](#); see also [Vallaes, De la Cruz, & Sasia, 2009](#)). These four pillars of USR will be the basis of the hypotheses of this study.

In all academic and social matters related to USR, university teachers are a vital part of the engine of change, being role models to their students in the practice of their professional activities ([Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007](#)). They are involved particularly in the development of the second pillar of USR mentioned before, professional training, where the key concept is to develop a university that prepares students to be responsible citizens and professionals in a human and sustainable way ([Vallaes et al., 2009](#), p. 32). However, researchers such as [Korthagen \(2004\)](#) and [Hooge, Honingh and Langelaan \(2011\)](#) have claimed that some teachers are not aware of their social role and subsequent impact on their students.

Thus, the first step toward relevant and realistic USR is to conduct a self-diagnostic study, which includes analyzing the practices, perceptions, and beliefs of the teaching staff as a focal group of impact ([Vallaes et al., 2009](#), pp. 24, 25). Such a study must thoroughly highlight the inclusion, or not, of citizen and social responsibility issues in the curriculum, the integration between professional and social knowledge, based on social projects, and the integration of external social actors in the design of subjects (*ibid*, 33).

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Teachers have a positive perception of the university's social practices.*

A responsible institution that is aware of the current social reality guarantees equality and non-discrimination for all those involved (students, teaching and research staff, administrative and service



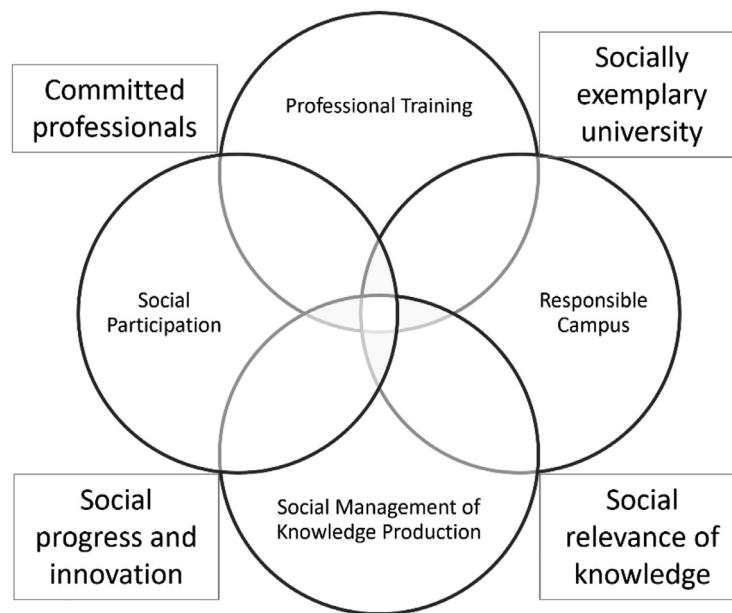


Fig. 2. Areas of USR. Source: Adapted from Vallaeys et al., 2009, p. 16

staff, etc.) in all its services and structures. It also reacts positively to environmental issues, as it is aware of the impact the institution has on the surrounding ecosystem (Guasch Murillo & Hernández Galán, 2012, p. 52). Teachers, as employees of this institution, should be encouraged by its CSR and advocate for its development (Ng, Yam & Aguinis, 2019, p. 109). This might impact the professional practices of teachers, given that “the more the company’s employees perceive the messages about CSR initiatives as believable and trustworthy, the more likely they are to think that their company is serving the greater community and is devoting time, money, and other resources to socially responsible causes” (Schaefer, Terlutter & Diehl, 2020, p. 209). However, the satisfaction of teachers specifically regarding USR practices has not yet been studied.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Teachers involved in subjects that include social issues attempt to include socially relevant topics in their curriculum.*

As in any institution, but especially for universities, knowledge is the main resource it can provide (Antunes, de & Pinheiro, 2020). An effective vocational education incorporates the principles and values of the protection of natural resources, ethics, equality, accessibility and non-discrimination in management, design, organization, subject matter, and teaching methodology. In practical terms, this is achieved by offering innovative and up-to-date educational services following the principles of ethics, social and environmental commitment, and the promotion of values, while being accountable to society (González, de la, Río, Robledo & Paunero, 2010, p. 236). Among the different aspects that promote a good USR, the management of academic training and dissemination of knowledge should include a satisfactory and up-to-date selection of the curricular content that reflects the real needs of students in their future employment (Pérez Domínguez, 2009, p. 12). As stated by Aparicio Payá and Martínez Navarro (2017):

The university education provided to future professionals must include among its objectives both the preparation for the design of a common and diverse social space and adequate training to live together in it, respecting the equal dignity of all people. (2017, p. 26, translated)

In a study conducted in Colombia (Fuentes Doria et al., 2020), CSR practices within higher education institutions were analyzed in relation to peace agreements. The study concludes that institutions can

contribute through teaching activities by an understanding of CSR as an essential part of their mission and vision.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Teachers involved in subjects that include social topics in their curriculum are aware of the need to keep up to date and well-informed about the needs of society.*

As stated by Antunes et al. (2020), “organizations gain efficient value by managing knowledge, generating new knowledge or creative combinations.” The production and management of knowledge, a key responsibility of university teachers, should focus on understanding the social reality of the environment and society, turning scientific activity toward this social responsibility (Vallaeys et al., 2009, p. 39). Teachers who are in charge of socially relevant subjects should direct such production of knowledge based on the real needs of the professional practice being taught to students, through an exchange of experiences between the university and external companies (Gallo, 2022, p. 206). In addition, the university and its members should participate in the community, cooperating through projects for the creation of mutual learning communities and the resolution of social problems (Guasch Murillo & Hernández Galán, 2012, p. 53). A study carried out in Pennsylvania, USA, on the partnership between the community of Hazelwood and Duquesne University concluded that through this collaboration “universities can deepen understandings and applications of knowledge,” its students “are naturally advantaged as critical advocates for community change and growth,” and communities “can stride toward heretofore unrealized social and professional horizons” (Hopson, Miller & Lovelace, 2016, p. 42).

## Methodology

The essence of the method chosen here centers on knowledge and attributed intention (Folgueiras Bertomeu, Luna González & Puig Latorre, 2013). The subject of analysis was the degree of knowledge about the teachers’ participation in the implementation of inclusive practices, the ethical work in their subjects, and the development of competencies. These variables respond to the aim of the project: to develop USR in the educational field, and how teachers are applying socially responsible teaching practices.

The sample used in this study is made up of selected teachers currently employed at a private business and marketing university located in Madrid, Spain, who participated by completing an

anonymous questionnaire during the 2022–2023 academic year. The degrees offered by this university are Business Management, Marketing, Digital Business, Data Science, Communication and Advertising (PR), and International Business. The sample was selected by the researchers considering the teachers whose subjects are linked to social responsibility in the business field. To do so, the teaching guides of the official academic degrees were consulted and analyzed, and those that included topics such as ethics, human resources, and legislation related to the subject matter were chosen, leading to the selection of a total of 40 teachers whose subjects were somehow linked. An email was sent to these teachers, resulting in a total of 21 participants who then completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included four sociodemographic questions and 21 Likert scales of five points, ranging from A lot to Not at all, with sentences related to USR based on [Vallaey et al. \(2009, pp. 42, 43, 49\)](#). It was presented using an online form (Office) in Spanish, to facilitate its understanding by the majority of respondents (see Appendix I). Once collected, the data were analyzed quantitatively and interpreted in light of current literature.

To simplify the following analysis, the USR questions were coded in the order they were presented in the questionnaire. These were then grouped into the four areas of USR mentioned before in the literature review: Responsible Campus, Social Management of Knowledge Production, Social Participation and Professional Training.

Results

Of the 21 participants, 14 are female, 7 are male, and the average age is 45.8. In terms of age, 14.29% are in the 30–39 age group, 52.38% are between 20 and 25 years old, and the remaining participants are between 50 and 59 years old. Regarding their academic background, 47.6% hold a PhD, 42.85% a master's degree, and 9.5% a bachelor's degree. [Table 1](#) shows the demographic information.

The subjects taught by the participants are shown in the word cloud of [Fig. 3](#) by size according to their recurrence.

This wide range of subjects is an excellent depiction of the weight that social issues have in business-related degrees. It is worth mentioning that the subject of modern languages also includes topics of social responsibility, as the methodology used by the department is content and language integrated learning and teachers develop social and business-related topics through the second language being taught.

Turning to the USR questionnaire, the analysis was carried out by the USR area.

Table 1  
Participants' demographics.

Age	30–39	40–49	50–59
%	14.29	52.38	33.33
n	3	11	7
Gender	Female	Male	Non-binary
%	66.67	33.33	0
n	14	7	0
Education	PhD	Master's	Degree
%	47.6	42.85	9.5
n	10	9	2

Responsible campus

There was a great variety of opinions regarding the perceptions that teachers have of the university's practices. While many see that teamwork and solidarity are promoted (71.4% on Q1: *Teamwork and solidarity are promoted in the university*), 66.7% do not believe that the university is socially responsible toward its staff (Q3: *The university is socially responsible toward its teaching and non-teaching staff*). Furthermore, 52.4% do not believe that there is gender equity in the governing bodies of the university (Q2: *There is gender equity in the university's governing bodies*).

In terms of environmental issues, opinions are also divided: 52.3% of participants believe that the university is environmentally responsible, but 57.1% are unaware of any institutional policy for the protection of the environment on campus (Q4: *The university is environmentally responsible* and Q5: *There is an institutional policy for the protection of the environment on campus*), respectively. Finally, 52.4% of participants perceive consistency between the principles stated by the university and the practices (Q8: *I believe there is consistency between the principles stated by the university and what is practiced on campus.*); however, 62% believe that the marketing and communication strategies of the university are socially responsible (Q9: *The university's communication and marketing are carried out in a socially responsible manner.*)

Professional training

More than half of the participants claimed to have never received training about environmental issues from the university (57.1%), and only 9.52% assert that they have received such training (Q6: *The*



Fig. 3. Word Cloud of subjects taught by the participants.

university provides the teaching and non-teaching staff with in-house training on environmental issues.).

Bearing in mind that the selected teachers were responsible for subjects related to social issues, it is quite surprising that 23.8% of them claimed that they do not link the theme of the content with current social and environmental issues (Q17: *I often link the thematic content taught with current social and environmental problems*). Nevertheless, the remaining 76.19% responded positively to this same question, with 28.5% on the top tier of the scale.

In general, teachers believe that the university provides students with sufficient social training that leads them to be socially responsible (Q12: *The university provides students with ethical and citizenship training that helps them to be socially responsible people*). In this case, 76.2% believe that this training is significant. Finally, Q7 (*The organization of campus life allows people to acquire appropriate ecological habits*) demonstrates that, indirectly, the organization of campus life barely affects the acquisition of ecological habits, given that 66.7% of teachers answered that it impacts only a little or not at all.

#### Social management of knowledge production

The great majority of teachers have never held internal meetings to discuss social matters on the career or the subject they teach, given that 42.8% answered Q13 (*I have had meetings with colleagues to examine the social responsibility aspects linked to the career/subject I teach*) with Not at all and 28.6% with A little. Similarly, 61.9% have never had meetings with external social actors nor with graduates to discuss current social demands (Q20: *In my major, we have had meetings with external social actors to discuss the social relevance of the curriculum* and Q21: *We have had meetings with graduates of the specialty to discuss the adequacy of the curriculum regarding current social demands*). However, 66.7% of teachers claim that their subjects are up to date and relevant to the different social needs of society (Q15: *The various courses I teach are up to date and respond to the social needs of the environment*), and 57.1% include activities in which students need to consider the impact on society (Q16: *In the courses I teach, students have to do activities that have a positive impact on the social environment*).

#### Social participation

The general contribution of the university and its actors to social matters does not seem to be perceived by the majority of participants. Only 19% believe that the university uses its marketing campaigns to promote values of social responsibility (Q11: *The university seeks to use its marketing campaigns to promote socially responsible values and issues*). However, 62% believe that the university promotes cooperation with other universities in the area (Q10: *The university promotes cooperative relationships with other universities in the area*). On a more personal level, 42.9% of teachers claimed to have actively participated in volunteering activities promoted by the university (Q19: *I have participated in solidarity volunteering activities with colleagues and students.*), and 23.8% could link their courses with social projects (Q18: *I have had the opportunity to link courses I teach with social projects outside the university*).

#### Discussion

From the analysis of the results of the survey, it is evident that teachers are not generally conscious of CSR practices in their campus lives. From gender equality to the protection of the environment, teachers do not believe that the university displays its policies clearly, in answer to H1. This agrees with the research carried out by Céspedes Aguirre (2019), who noticed that teachers usually do not have a positive opinion about the governance administration of universities in matters of human resources and environment. As in any

other business with a non-perceived CSR, this might affect their sense of institutional pride and, ultimately, the support they give to the university's actions and their professional development (Ng et al., 2019). However, a socially responsible university has a positive effect on its employees, in this case, teachers, in terms of reputation, commitment, funding and competitiveness (Lo, Pang, Egri & Li, 2017, p. 56). A responsible university should prioritize autonomy, transparent communication, deliberative dialog, and respect for human rights and environmental protection while engaging its members in governance processes to make decisions that benefit the academic community (Sanz et al., 2017, p. 61).

Through the questions regarding social participation and professional training, only a small number of teachers actively include social matters in their subjects and encourage students to consider these issues (H2). This coincides with the research carried out by Balyer and Özcan (2020, p. 6), which claims that teachers are not aware of their social role and the impact they have on students' beliefs. The same study proposes that training is key to developing such needed awareness. In addition, Hooge et al. (2011) state that "although the teachers are aware of a 'normative pedagogical social mission,' the majority are not aware that they are expected to perform a 'broad social mission'" (p. 311). Another factor to highlight is that the enthusiasm and motivation of teachers regarding social issues can also influence how these future professionals develop their activities and put social actions into practice (Frenzel, Taxer, Schwab & Kuhbandner, 2019).

The same concern can be seen in the social management of knowledge production (H3), since there is very little discussion about how social matters should be incorporated into the subjects and how the knowledge in this area should be dealt with. Social responsibility should ultimately be developed "from the external demands of the professional environment" (Gallo, 2022, p. 206); however, the results have shown that the majority of teachers do not take external social actors into consideration and there is no discussion of social matters when designing the curriculum. As stated by Lo et al. (2017) "the reciprocal interaction between university and community is the key link where knowledge can be discovered and transformed into productivity and innovation" (p. 49). The only way an educational institution can interact with the society around it is by participating in public debates concerning societal matters that impact the common good and universal citizenship, thereby fostering engagement and contributing to the betterment of society (Sanz et al., 2017, p. 61).

One of the implications of these results is that teachers need to acquire knowledge about social issues and be aware of their role, reflecting on their practice and the impact they have on their students' professional careers. One example is the training activity proposed by Ramos Santana, Moral Mora, Chiva Sanchís and Pérez Carbonell (2022). Although it was aimed at education teachers and universal design, this action has proved to be an effective tool in changing teachers' attitudes, increasing their commitment to being responsible for the learning process of students and the design, implementation and assessment of research, and raising awareness about the role the university as an institution must have. Similar training could be proposed to teachers at business universities, guiding them to a better inclusion of topics of social relevance in their subjects.

Another implication is the need to form alliances between the university and the community. Sanz et al. (2017) advocate that "when people exercise their freedoms through social participation, they participate in the definition or selection of the social priorities that make it possible to establish the conditions to expand their personal capabilities" (p.63). By promoting such partnerships, the university will play a greater role as an advocate of social demands and developments, helping it to achieve a more inclusive and environmentally friendly status (Hopson et al., 2016). Innovative strategies such as service learning have been proven to be an effective way to



promote such alliances and increase the participation of universities in society (Compare, Albanesi & Pieri, 2022).

Achieving a higher level of social responsibility and fulfilling the previously mentioned axes of USR in a university is not an effortless undertaking. A series of academic and administrative changes must be made to reach this goal, being the diagnosis displayed in this study the first phase. As stated by Vallaeys et al. (2009, p. 27), the following tasks must be undertaken:

- Conduct a self-diagnostic study of the university's activities regularly.
- Select and support areas of improvement and the implementation of programs of social responsibility.
- Produce social and environmental responsibility reports and disseminate them to stakeholders for the continuous improvement of the institution.
- Support academic areas in defining their social impacts (possible risks of negative collateral effects of training and research) and promote the linkage of teaching–learning processes with social projects in dialog with external actors.
- Support the administrative areas in the implementation of good labor and environmental practices by implementing a consensual labor policy and a university environmental management and education system.
- Promote social responsibility among different audiences inside and outside the university, through campaigns, training, academic events, etc.

It was beyond the scope of this research to evaluate the practices of the university regarding social matters, which could also be analyzed to compare them to the perceptions of the teachers. These could lead to changes and developments of practices that consider the teachers' opinions, as participants in the university's actions. Furthermore, the way the topic of social responsibility in their subjects is presented to students and its weight in the curriculum were not considered, only the perceptions and opinions of the teachers. Another limitation was the number of teaching staff who met the requirements of the study; given the size of the university and the number of degrees offered, the sample was limited to 21 participants.

This diagnostic questionnaire could be developed further and applied to the entire faculty to compare their beliefs and obtain a broader view of how the university develops its social responsibility. In addition, the academic guides and lesson plans of the socially relevant subjects could be analyzed to ascertain to what extent social matters are included and how they are presented to students. This could ultimately lead to guidelines and best practices that address the ever-changing needs of society.

## Conclusions

Nowadays, advocating for social justice matters has become a core concern worldwide. In this sense, universities are increasingly becoming more receptive and sensitive to social demands, both as transmitters of knowledge and trainers of future workers in awareness of their social impact.

The results obtained in this study on the perceptions of the teachers at a private university regarding the USR practices carried out in the institution show a disparity in the hypotheses posed for each of the areas related to USR collected from the scientific literature.

In general, the teachers participating in the study have a favorable opinion of their institution as a promoter of social practices, and there is widespread satisfaction among the teaching staff with the environmental commitment of the institution, although they are unaware of the environmental policies carried out on campus. In terms of training, the study highlights the need for greater investment in faculty training so that they can connect the content of their courses with

current issues of social responsibility and have a greater impact on the environmental awareness of undergraduates. Likewise, a greater connection with external agents in social management and knowledge production would be necessary, as would the implementation of communicative actions aimed at making teachers more aware of the campaigns carried out by their university to promote social responsibility values and participation in volunteer actions.

Thus, in addition to responding to these social demands through knowledge production, higher education institutions must train students to become professionals who are aware of their social impact. Teachers—the backbone of the higher education system—must strive to perform their role as educators in its entirety, aiming to include such topics in their subjects as relevant, necessary, and objective competencies. Only in this way will it be possible to narrow the existing gap between the content of the curricula and the training demanded by the current global context.

Likewise, in view of the results obtained, greater exposure of students to those USR-related activities being carried out in society is necessary, to produce feedback between the university and society.

Only through their effort will students receive the education they need to face the demands of a society that strives to achieve a type of inclusiveness that caters to all, is environmentally aware and responsible, and has a sustainable governance strategy. It is in our hands as researchers to put into action the diagnosis and promote changes.

Although this research is a modest contribution to USR practices, it does provide valuable information to understand its perception by university faculty and contributes to filling the gap in the literature on this subject. Future research could broaden the field of study and provide relevant information aimed at implementing standardized systems for evaluating these social responsibility actions in higher education centers.

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