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Higher education institution management: social responsibility in the context of global challenges

Gestión de instituciones de educación superior: responsabilidad social en el contexto de los retos globales

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Abstract

This study examines how Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEIs) implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the barriers to its integration, and generates evidence to inform institutional policy development. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was administered online to students, faculty, and administrative staff (n = 189) selected purposively. Data were analyzed in Excel and SPSS using descriptive statistics, t tests, Pearson correlation, and content analysis of open responses. Expert review and pilot testing (n = 30) supported instrument validity; Cronbach's alpha = 0.87. HEIs report active CSR practices: sustainable development initiatives (72%; mean effectiveness 4.1; SD = 0.6) and environmental



measures (68%; median 4). Volunteering is widespread (65%) but less effective (mean 3.5; SD = 0.9). Key barriers include limited funding (74%) and low awareness (61%). CSR management correlates positively with green initiatives ($r = 0.27$). Effectiveness ratings differ among administration (mean 4.2), faculty (3.8; $p = 0.004$), and students (3.4; $p < 0.001$). Strengthening faculty/student engagement, targeted training, dedicated funding, and internal communication is recommended. Findings indicate strong potential for CSR in Ukrainian HEIs, yet implementation remains fragmented and dependent on internal resources and individual initiative. Integrating CSR metrics into accreditation processes and linking incentives to performance may accelerate uptake nationally.

Keywords: educational policy, social responsibility, sustainable development, transformation, universities.

Resumen

El estudio examina cómo las instituciones de educación superior (IES) de Ucrania implementan la responsabilidad social corporativa (RSC) y qué barreras limitan su integración para fundamentar decisiones institucionales. Se realizó encuesta transversal cuantitativa en línea a estudiantes, docentes y personal administrativo seleccionados intencionalmente ($n = 189$). Los datos se procesaron en Excel y SPSS mediante estadísticas descriptivas, pruebas t, correlación de Pearson y análisis de contenido de respuestas abiertas. La validez del cuestionario se apoyó en revisión de expertos y prueba piloto ($n = 30$); alfa de Cronbach = 0.87. Las IES reportan prácticas activas de RSC: iniciativas de desarrollo sostenible (72%; eficacia media 4.1; $\sigma = 0.6$) y medidas ambientales (68%; mediana 4). El voluntariado es frecuente (65%) pero menos eficaz (media 3.5; $\sigma = 0.9$). Barreras clave: financiación limitada (74%) y baja concienciación (61%). La gestión de la RSC se correlaciona positivamente con iniciativas ecológicas ($r = 0.27$). Las valoraciones de eficacia difieren entre administración (4.2), docentes (3.8; $p = 0.004$) y estudiantes (3.4; $p < 0.001$). Se recomienda ampliar la participación de docentes y estudiantes, formación, fondos dedicados y mejor comunicación interna; la implementación sigue fragmentada y dependiente de recursos e iniciativas individuales dentro de las IES.

Palabras clave: política educativa, responsabilidad social, desarrollo sostenible, transformación, universidades.

Introduction

The meaning of higher education institutions (HEIs) is changing significantly, in particular, they are no longer considered only as places for training specialists but are increasingly perceived as active players in the formation of the social agenda. At the same time, current global challenges (pandemics, climate change, wars) significantly affect the functioning and strategic development of HEIs. Active climate change requires environmental awareness and sustainable solutions, while digital transformation affects changes in teaching, management and communication formats. Wars and various political crises create instability and force educational institutions to adapt to emergency situations (Hidalgo-León et al., 2024). In the Ukrainian sense, these challenges are of particular importance, because the education system operates in conditions of a full-scale war, which affects not only the physical infrastructure of HEIs, but also the mental health of students and teachers, international cooperation, access to resources and development prospects.

In such an environment, social responsibility plays an important role for HEI management. The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which originated in the business environment, is gradually finding application in the educational context (Billedeau et al., 2025). A socially responsible university not only adheres to ethical principles in its activities, but also actively contributes to the sustainable development of society, cares about the well-being of its employees and students and, importantly, promotes access to quality education regardless of social status. In addition, the relevance of this approach is also determined by the post-crisis reconstruction and modernization of the Ukrainian higher education system. HEIs can become centers for the formation of a new culture of responsibility, civic activity and social cohesion.

However, despite the growing importance of social responsibility in the field of higher education, there are still several problems that complicate the effective integration of CSR into the HEI management system. There are serious gaps both in the scientific understanding of this phenomenon and in management practice. Social responsibility is often perceived as an optional activity, rather than as a strategic element of university development. Within Ukrainian borders, this is manifested in the insufficient understanding of the essence and potential of CSR by the management of HEIs, the absence of a comprehensive social responsibility policy, as well as the formal nature of some initiatives that do not have a real impact on stakeholders. There is also a noticeable lack of research on the main mechanisms of CSR in the management processes of HEIs. This affects the formation of an information vacuum that prevents the formation of effective models and solutions. Therefore, it is important to analyze the features of the implementation of social responsibility in Ukrainian HEIs (See Figure 1).

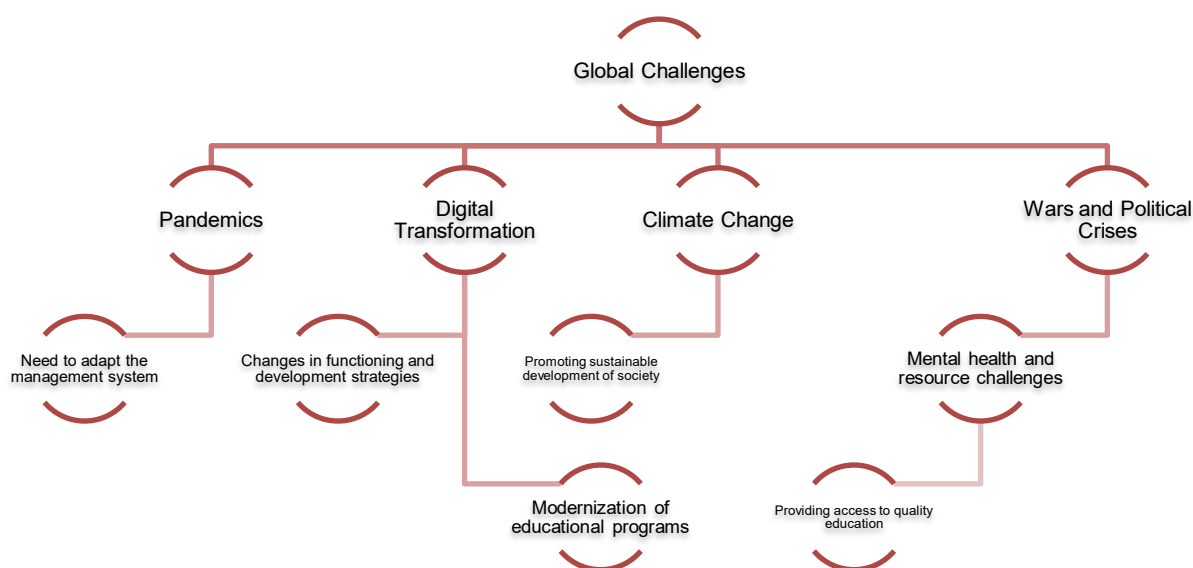


Figure 1. Structure and interrelationships of key aspects.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to study the features of the integration of social responsibility principles in higher education institutions in Ukraine in order to respond to modern global challenges. The research questions are as follows:

1. What social responsibility practices do HEIs in Ukraine use to address global challenges?
2. What barriers prevent the effective integration of CSR into the HEI management system?
3. How do key stakeholders – students, faculty, and administration – evaluate the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in higher education?

Literature Review

The concept of social responsibility in education has been actively used since the early 2000s in the sense of a kind of adaptation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) ideas to the academic environment. While the classic definition of CSR covered economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility, in the context of higher education institutions, the emphasis shifts to the social mission of the university, its impact on communities, and the promotion of sustainable development (Hidalgo-León et al., 2024).

Recent studies indicate that social responsibility plays the role of a new paradigm of university management, which requires consideration of the impact of educational institutions on society. The authors

also identified the main components of social responsibility (Basheer et al., 2025). In particular, some scholars highlight aspects such as responsibility in teaching and learning, ethical management, socially oriented research, stakeholder engagement, and environmental responsibility (Geschwind et al., 2019; Gonzalo Cortez, 2023). Other researchers have drawn attention to the need to develop social responsibility strategies within the overall development policy of HEIs, rather than as a temporary initiative or PR stunt (Gulua et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to implement CSR strategies that take into account both environmental and social aspects, taking into account the assessment of sustainable initiatives.

Global challenges and their impact on HEIs

In the context of globalization and instability in the 21st century, higher education institutions face a number of challenges that directly affect both their internal structure and external mission (van den Beemt et al., 2023). In particular, researchers have pointed to challenges such as climate change, technological breakthroughs, exacerbating social inequality, wars, pandemics, and mobility disruptions (Horzela, 2020; Seitenova et al., 2023). These challenges are forcing HEIs to adapt their management models, modernize their curricula, implement distance learning technologies, and rethink their social role.

Some studies also indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a significant challenge to the modern education system, especially in the management sector (Oleksiyenko et al., 2022; Streck et al., 2024). The works also indicate that HEIs with clearly defined CSR policies were better able to adapt to the new conditions and transition to digital learning more quickly. At the same time, according to Stepanova et al. (2023) the war has presented HEIs with new challenges, in particular, the active digitization of learning has begun. In this sense, the social responsibility of universities has become particularly important, as pointed out by contemporary scholars. Moreover, Davison & Joia (2022) pointed out the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation in the Latin American region. Deroncele-Acosta et al. (2023) acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital change in higher education. At the same time, Okoye et al. (2022) detailed the importance of digital technologies in teaching and learning. At the same time, the authors pointed out the heterogeneity of coverage, technical and infrastructural barriers. Galvez & Revinova (2025) assessed the development of digital technologies in Latin American countries and pointed out the main drivers and challenges shaping the future direction of digitalization in the educational sector. da Cruz et al. (2025) described the phenomenon of "platformization" of higher education as a new form of organizing the educational process, which is transforming the management of HEIs.

HEI management models taking CSR into account

Contemporary authors have analyzed various management models that take social responsibility into account and are based on the principles of ethical management. In particular, the authors drew attention to models based on the stakeholder approach and the principles of sustainable development. In particular, the study points to a CSR structure for higher education that includes strategic planning and internal responsibility (towards employees and students). Some authors point to the effectiveness of impact monitoring (Nogueiro & Saraiva, 2023). Cavalcanti-Bandos et al. (2021) pointed out promising directions in learning management, in particular, they paid attention to the involvement of innovative methods for training managers. They pointed to the role of business programs in higher education institutions in Brazil, Colombia and Peru in integrating education for sustainable development and forming "sustainability literacy". The authors identified the importance of a systemic approach to education that combines theoretical knowledge with changes in students' behavior aimed at social and environmental responsibility. Leal Filho et al. (2025) expanded this idea and paid attention to the involvement of stakeholders (students, teachers, the public) in the process of promoting sustainable development.

The study by Ojeda Portugal et al. (2023) points to a model of university management through components such as resources, reputation, results, and responsibility. The authors determined that the inclusion of CSR in a university's strategy not only increases its attractiveness to applicants and partners but also contributes to sustainability in times of crisis (Paudel, 2020; Lluch & Amdam, 2024). Hence, studies on CSR in



Ukrainian higher education institutions are few and far between and are descriptive in nature. Most publications focus on general considerations about the “social mission.” Also, most studies consider CSR in higher education primarily from a theoretical perspective, without providing detailed analysis of specific management practices or implementation models in the context of instability, war, or crisis. The analysis of social responsibility focuses mainly on the level of higher education institutions, without considering the interaction with state educational policies or local initiatives. Existing publications related to the social responsibility of Ukrainian HEIs are mostly descriptive in nature and do not contain quantitative or comparative analysis, which makes it difficult to substantiate conclusions. Therefore, this study will fill this gap and determine the integration of CSR into higher education. To implement this article, the stakeholder theory, which defines interaction with all interested parties, was used. This is complemented by the concept of sustainable development in education, which has defined higher education institutions as a driving force for change in society.

Theoretical Framework and Philosophical Paradigm in Literature

Within the framework of modern transformations, the social responsibility of HEIs should be assessed through the prism of several theoretical approaches and philosophical paradigms. One of the dominant theories is the theory of sustainable development, which involves the harmonization of educational, economic and social functions of HEIs in order to ensure a long-term positive impact on society and the environment. Within this approach, HEI management is considered as a holistic system capable of responding to the challenges of globalization by integrating the principles of environmental, social and economic responsibility. Another key paradigm used in the study is the humanistic philosophy of education, which emphasizes the ethical dimension of HEI activities and the development of the individual as a value. According to this logic, social responsibility is understood as the duty to form citizens with stable moral and ethical orientations, capable of critical thinking, social involvement and global awareness. An important place in the modern scientific space is also occupied by the paradigm of global citizenship, which combines elements of cosmopolitanism, intercultural competence and social activism. This approach requires that HEIs not only produce knowledge, but also contribute to the formation of responsible citizens who are aware of their role in solving global problems. Also, in modern literature, the use of a systems approach to management is widespread, according to which HEIs function as open social systems that interact with the external environment. This approach makes it possible to take into account the influence of global factors, in particular, migration, technological change, political instability. Given the growing social demand for responsible education, new philosophical approaches are emerging, in particular, critical education theory, which focuses on overcoming structural inequality through educational practices. In this context, HEI management should be aimed not only at efficiency, but also at the transformation of society by supporting social justice, equal access to knowledge and academic freedom.

Thus, modern theoretical and philosophical principles have indicated that higher education management in the face of global challenges should be multidimensional, interdisciplinary, and ethically motivated.

Methodology

Research design

This study is empirical in nature, as it is based on the systematic collection and analysis of factual, observed data on the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in higher education institutions (HEIs) of Ukraine in the context of modern global challenges. As noted, empirical research involves the use of measurable and observed evidence to generate new knowledge and is particularly relevant when investigating real practices, attitudes and behavior of participants in the educational process. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a quantitative approach was chosen using a cross-sectional survey design. Such a design is most appropriate, as it allows collecting data from a large number of respondents at a certain point in time, which makes it possible to determine general trends, levels of awareness, assessments and perceptions of CSR practices by different groups of stakeholders in HEIs (Malagón Castro et al., 2025).



Cross-sectional surveys are particularly effective in cases where it is necessary to obtain a cross-section of the current situation without resorting to more difficult-to-implement long-term (longitudinal) studies. In addition, the quantitative approach allows the use of statistical analysis methods, which contributes to obtaining substantiated, objective conclusions (Pinheiro et al., 2023; Chapman & Montecinos, 2024). This made it possible to quantitatively assess the level of involvement in CSR in higher education institutions, to analyze differences in perception between the administration, teachers and students. Therefore, the chosen empirical, quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey is the most justified for solving the research problem, since it combines analysis with a wide coverage of the target audience.

Sample

The main participants in the study were representatives of three main groups of HEI stakeholders: administration, teachers and students. The choice of these groups was due to the fact that they are directly involved in management decisions, the implementation of the educational process and are end users of HEI services.

The sampling method was a convenient stratified sample, which made it possible to divide respondents into separate subgroups (strata) according to their role in the HEI, as well as to attract available participants through official university channels, social networks and e-mail. This approach allows to ensure a diversity of points of view and increase the generalizability of the results.

189 respondents from different regions of Ukraine took part in the study, in particular from universities in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Odessa, Dnipro and other cities. The sample included:

35 representatives of the administration (heads of faculties, vice-rectors, heads of departments),
61 teachers, 93 students (bachelor's, master's, postgraduate).

Table 1.
Characteristics of study participants

Respondent Category	Number	Percentage of total sample	Main regions	Notes
Administration	35	18.5 %	Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv	Deputy deans, vice-rectors, heads of departments
Faculty	61	32.3 %	Odesa, Dnipro, Chernivtsi, Kyiv	Teachers of various disciplines (humanities, technical, economic areas)
Students	93	49.2 %	Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Ivano-Frankivsk	Bachelor's, master's, postgraduate students

Source: Author's development.

The regional representation of respondents is summarized in Figure 2. The figure shows that the largest number of participants came from the southern and eastern regions (Odesa, Kharkiv), while the smallest number came from the Dnipro. This indicated regional activity, interest in the research, or availability of information in certain cities.

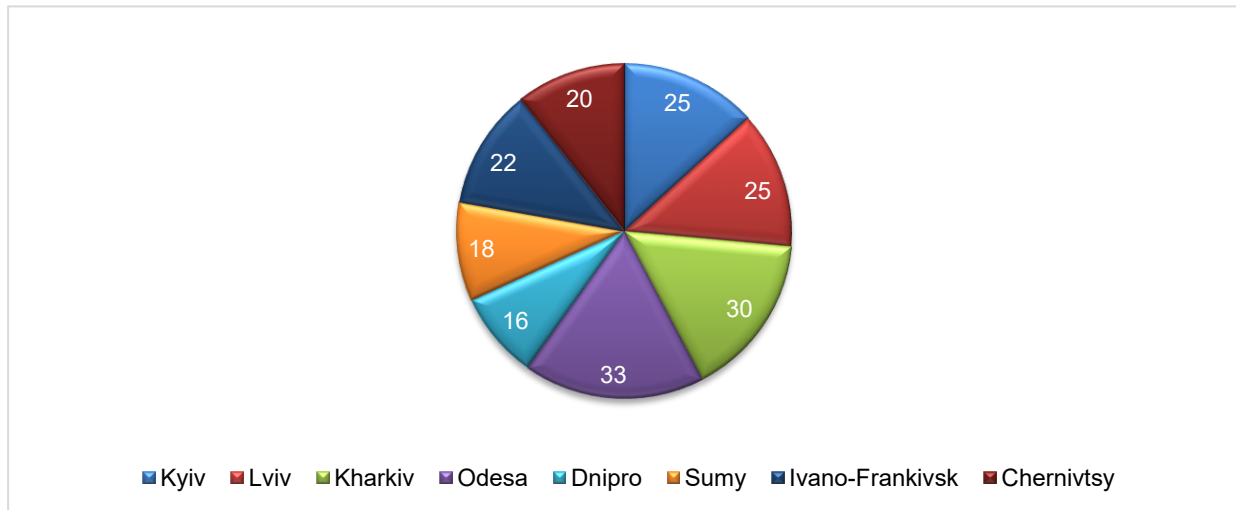


Figure 2. The regional representation of participants.

Procedure and Instruments

The main data collection tool was a questionnaire, which was designed to identify the main features of the management of an educational institution. It includes both closed questions rated on a Likert scale (from 1 to 5) and open questions, which allowed respondents to freely express their opinions. The questionnaire structure is divided into four blocks:

1. General information about the respondent (position, type of HEI, region, work/study experience).
2. Assessment of the implementation of CSR practices in the institution (How effectively does your HEI implement sustainable development initiatives? ", "Do you feel the impact of the HEI's social projects on the community?").
3. Identification of problems and barriers ("What are the main obstacles to integrating CSR in your HEI?").
4. Proposals and visions of the future of CSR in education (open questions).

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted on 12 participants (4 from each strategy) before the main stage of the study. This allowed us to identify and eliminate unclear or ambiguous wording, check the logic of the question arrangement and the clarity of the rating scale.

The survey was conducted in the format of an online questionnaire created on the Google Forms platform, which ensured easy access for respondents and convenient processing of results. The link to the questionnaire was distributed through various channels. In particular, official university email newsletters, groups of teachers and students on social networks (Facebook, Telegram, Viber) and personal contacts of teachers and administrative staff.

Before filling out the questionnaire, respondents saw introductory information, which indicated the purpose of the study, approximate duration (5–7 min), the principles of anonymity, voluntary participation and the absence of risks for participants. Only after familiarization and confirmation of informed consent could they proceed to filling it out. To increase the reliability of the data, a function was implemented in the form that allowed each respondent to fill out the questionnaire only once (IP address restriction).

The study lasted from May 1 to June 5, 2025, that is, for five weeks. During this period, 189 valid responses were received, which corresponds to the previously planned minimum sample for a study of this scale.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for analysis. Statistical methods were used for quantitative data. The calculation of mean values and standard deviation, median and mode were used. This was used to determine the overall level of CSR perception. A t-test was also used to compare scores between different groups of respondents. Pearson's correlation coefficient made it possible to analyze the relationship between the level of awareness and the assessment of the effectiveness of CSR practices.

Open-ended questions were coded based on content analysis. This made it possible to identify recurring themes, patterns and unique opinions. Initially, the answers were manually coded with the main categories ("lack of resources", "low level of involvement", "insufficient communication"), after which they were quantitatively summarized. A comparison method was also used, which made it possible to compare the obtained data with the results of other scientists.

Questionnaire Validation Process

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was developed based on an in-depth analysis of the scientific literature on the topic of social responsibility in higher education, as well as international approaches to assessing the social responsibility of educational institutions. After initial development, the questionnaire was submitted for expert evaluation to three scholars in the field of educational management and sociology, who assessed its logical structure, clarity of wording, and relevance of questions to the research objectives. After that, a pilot survey was conducted among a small sample of respondents ($n = 30$), which allowed us to check the clarity of the wording, ease of navigation, and adequacy of the proposed rating scales. Based on the results of the pilot, adjustments were made to the wording of several questions, which improved the interpretability and content accuracy of the instrument.

Instrument Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The overall score for all items of the questionnaire was 0.87, indicating a high level of reliability of the instrument. Thus, the questionnaire as a data collection tool was thoroughly validated and tested for reliability, which ensures the reliability and representativeness of the research results, and also allows us to draw reasonable conclusions about the current state of CSR in the higher education system of Ukraine.

Ethical aspects

The study followed modern principles of research ethics. Before filling out the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the approximate duration of participation, and the voluntary nature of participation. The questionnaire also included informed consent. This consent included confirmation of consent to the use of responses for scientific purposes. The anonymity of all participants was also guaranteed: no personal data that could be used to identify an individual was collected in the questionnaire. The data was stored in encrypted form, and only the author of the study had access to them.

Results and Discussion

Social responsibility practices in higher education institutions of Ukraine

Based on a survey of 189 respondents, it was found that Ukrainian HEIs are actively implementing various forms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) aimed at responding to global challenges. Sustainable development initiatives have become popular. This involves the integration of ESG principles into curricula, cooperation with communities, and energy efficiency. This indicator also has a high average efficiency score (4.1). The stability of this indicator is confirmed by a low standard deviation (0.6). Volunteering,

despite its high prevalence (65%), demonstrates a lower average efficiency score (3.5) and higher variability of scores ($\sigma = 0.9$). This may indicate a lack of systemic support or different forms of engagement. At the same time, environmental practices and green initiatives also received high support and stable scores (median = 4). However, although transparency in management is an important indicator, it is still an insufficiently implemented component in the CSR system in HEIs (See Table 2).

Table 2.
The most common CSR practices

CSR practices	Percentage of respondents (%)	Average effectiveness rating (1–5)	Median	Mode	Standard deviation
Sustainable development initiatives	72%	4.1	4	4	0.6
Environmental measures	68%	4.0	4	4	0.7
Volunteer projects	65%	3.5	3	3	0.9
Transparency in management	58%	3.8	4	4	0.8

Source: Author's development

Barriers to effective integration of CSR into the management system of higher education institutions

Based on the processing of qualitative data from respondents' open-ended answers and statistical generalization, several key barriers of a systemic and organizational nature were identified. In particular, notable problems include lack of funding (74%) and low awareness (61%). Other common barriers include formalism in the implementation of social initiatives, insufficient support from management, and teachers being overloaded with administrative work, which hinders the implementation of social responsibility in higher education institutions (See Table 3).

Table 3.
The main barriers (by % of mentions)

Barriers	Percentage of respondents (%)	Average importance score (1–5)
Lack of funding	74%	4.3
Low level of awareness about CSR	61%	3.9
Formalism in implementing initiatives	56%	3.6
Lack of strategic vision	48%	4.0
Insufficient support from management	42%	3.7
Teachers overloaded with administrative work	37%	3.4

Source: Author's development

In order to establish the relationships between different aspects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in higher education, a heat matrix was constructed based on Pearson correlation coefficients. The obtained correlation coefficients ranged from -0.23 to $+0.27$. This indicates mainly weak or moderate linear relationships between the variables. All relationships were two-way and were calculated based on normalized assessments of respondents (teachers, students, and administration). The strongest positive correlation is the Governance – Eco relationship ($r = 0.27$). That is, modern HEIs with a more structured approach to CSR management implement systemic initiatives. In particular, energy efficiency, waste sorting, and “green” campuses have become important. The Barriers – Effectiveness relationship ($r = 0.20$) is counterintuitive, as it was expected that in the presence of barriers, effectiveness would be assessed lower. However, the result may reflect the subjective perception of success against the background of difficulties. The Eco – Effectiveness relationship ($r = 0.18$) indicates a high symbolic and practical value of

environmental activities in higher education. The Volunteering – Eco relationship ($r = -0.23$) is negative. A possible explanation is the lack of integration of these areas into common CSR strategies (See Table 4).

Table 4.
Heatmap of Pearson correlation coefficients

	Sustainability	Volunteering	Governance	Eco	Barriers	Effectiveness
Sustainability	1	-0,11	0,16	0,04	-0,01	0,12
Volunteering	-0,11	1	-0,2	-0,23	-0,05	-0,1
Governance	0,16	-0,2	1	0,27	-0,1	0,12
Eco	0,04	-0,23	0,27	1	0,04	0,18
Barriers	-0,01	-0,05	-0,1	0,04	1	0,2
Effectiveness	0,12	-0,1	0,12	0,18	0,2	1

Source: Author's development

Assessment of the effectiveness of socially responsible initiatives

Comparative analysis of mean scores using a paired t-test was used to identify differences in the perception of the effectiveness of socially responsible initiatives among key participants in higher education - administration, teachers and students. The highest score was obtained among the administration - 4.2. This can be explained by the direct participation of administrative staff in the development and implementation of such initiatives. Teachers gave a slightly lower score (3.8), which is statistically significantly different from the administration's assessment ($p = 0.004$). Students rated the effectiveness of CSR initiatives the lowest (3.4), while the difference in comparison with both the administration ($p < 0.001$) and teachers ($p = 0.036$) is statistically significant. This can be explained by the lower level of awareness of students about CSR projects (See Table 5).

Table 5.
Mean values of CSR-initiatives effectiveness assessments

Comparison groups	Average score (Administration)	SD (Administration)	Average score (Other group)	SD (Other group)	t-statistic	df	p-value	Conclusion
Administration vs. Teachers	4.2	0.51	3.8	0.62	2.95	94	0.004	Significant difference
Administration vs. Students	4.2	0.51	3.4	0.70	5.82	126	< 0.001	Significant difference
Teachers vs. Students	3.8	0.62	3.4	0.70	2.12	152	0.036	Significant difference

Source: Author's development

Thus, such indicators showed that there is a gap in the perception of the effectiveness of CSR initiatives between different categories of participants. To increase the overall effectiveness and acceptance of CSR in HEIs, a greater level of communication should be implemented. In addition, attention should be paid to involving teachers and students in the implementation of socially responsible projects (Figure 3).

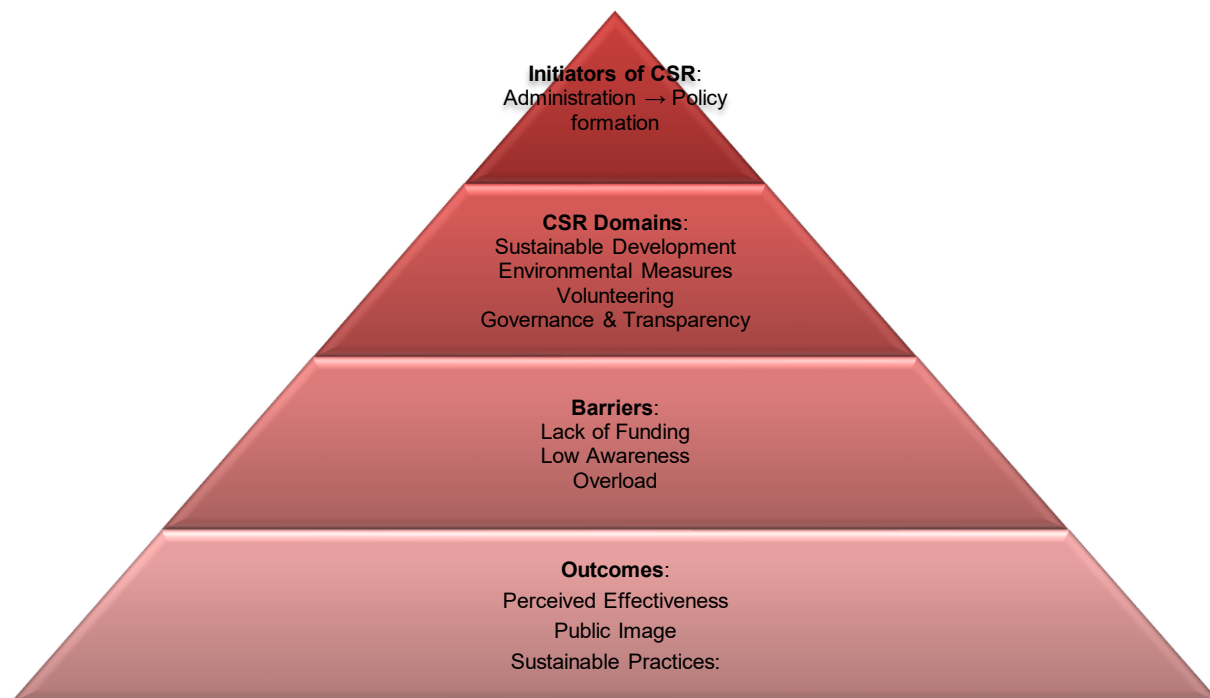


Figure 3. Flowchart of CSR integration process in Ukrainian HEIs.

The research problem was to identify key corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices most implemented by higher education institutions in Ukraine, identify barriers to their implementation, and analyze the perception of the effectiveness of such initiatives by various participants in the educational process. Indicators were taken from the administration, teachers, and students.

Discussion

The study found that the most common CSR practices are sustainable development initiatives (72% of participants), environmental measures (68%), and volunteer projects (65%). Transparency in management is present in 58% of HEIs. The average rating of the effectiveness of these measures varies from 3.5 to 4.1 on a five-point scale. This indicates that certain practices, especially those related to sustainable development, are more widespread. Therefore, it can be concluded that CSR in the field of higher education in Ukraine is not yet a widespread practice, but it has positive dynamics. These data are generally consistent with other studies, which indicate that important social areas of development in the university environment are environmental sustainability, academic integrity, and participation in community initiatives (Preuss, 2023). The study by Bernasconi (2025) and Cepeda-Másmela (2024) defined the concept of a sustainable university and proposes an approach that includes environmental, social, and economic components for sustainable development. Other researchers also identify the importance of integrating sustainability into all areas of university activity (education, research, management, public relations) (Passant, 2024). Therefore, similar to this article, the criteria of environmental responsibility and sustainable development occupy a prominent place in CSR strategies (Ruipérez-Valiente et al., 2022). Other studies also indicate that CSR in higher education is often defined by volunteer initiatives and open communication with the public (Billedeau et al., 2025). Although inclusive programs and academic integrity measures were hardly mentioned in this study, other researchers focus on them and determine that they are important for social inclusion and the human rights dimension of CSR (Panait et al., 2022; Brunner & Alarcón, 2024). As other studies have shown, global practice in the formation of CSR in educational institutions includes not only the environmental component, but also the principles of social justice, cultural diversity, and gender

equality (Pinheiro et al., 2023; Tilak, 2022). This imbalance points to potential areas for the development of CSR programs in Ukrainian universities.

The study also points to the main barriers to the implementation of CSR. Participants most often mentioned insufficient funding, a lack of competent personnel, limited strategic support from management, and low awareness of CSR among students and teachers. Another notable challenge is the lack of a regulatory framework for integrating CSR into the management system of higher education institutions. These findings are also supported by other researchers, who have pointed out that lack of funding and institutional support are important obstacles to CSR (Trocki et al., 2020; Zaman et al., 2020). Other studies have also drawn attention to the limited involvement of management, which negatively affects the development of strategic integration of social responsibility (Turabay et al., 2023; Ramírez Plascencia & Alonzo González, 2025). Similarly, according to the results of this study, the governance factor has a positive correlation with environmental practices ($r = 0.27$).

The results of the t-test showed that the administration rates the effectiveness of CSR initiatives significantly higher than students (mean values of 4.05 and 3.49, respectively, $p < 0.01$). Teachers demonstrate an intermediate position (3.83), which also differs significantly from the student assessment ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be interpreted that students are more sensitive to initiatives related to social impact. Similar conclusions have been drawn in studies indicating that young people expect universities to be more involved in addressing global issues such as climate change, poverty, and human rights (Deroncele-Acosta, et al., 2023). It is also worth agreeing that differences in assessments may also be due to varying levels of awareness. Thus, the study found that CSR in higher education in Ukraine is developing mainly in environmental and social areas (Ruipérez-Valiente et al., 2022). However, there are also some problems. In general, universities have shown a willingness to integrate CSR, but this requires support at the state level, strengthening of management capacity, and raising awareness among all participants in the educational process (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Austin & Jones, 2024; Caminero-Santangelo, 2025). The results provide a basis for developing strategies for implementing CSR in the management system of higher education institutions, taking into account the institutional specifics and needs of all participants in the educational process.

Despite the value of the data obtained, the study has a number of limitations. First, the sample size ($n=189$) is limited for a complete representation of all regions of Ukraine. Most respondents were from large cities, so regional unevenness is possible. Second, the study is predominantly quantitative and does not provide a complete picture of motivations or qualitative assessments of CSR. Third, respondents' assessments are subjective and depend on personal experience or awareness of HEI policies. The type of institution (public or private) was also not taken into account. This, in turn, may influence CSR priorities. In the future, it is planned to conduct a more representative study using qualitative methods. In particular, the processing of results from focus groups and interviews should be included. The use of such tools will provide a better understanding of the barriers and characteristics of social responsibility implementation.

Conclusions

Thus, Ukrainian higher education institutions most often implement sustainable development initiatives (reported by 72% of respondents, with an average effectiveness rating of 4.1 on a 5-point scale) and environmental measures (68%, average rating 4.0). Transparency in the management of the institution is recognized by 58% of participants, with an average effectiveness rating of 3.8. Volunteering is also widely covered (65%), although it received a relatively lower effectiveness rating of 3.5. These results indicated a trend towards prioritizing environmental and sustainable development-related aspects of corporate social responsibility in the higher education sector. The study also identified certain barriers, in particular of the organizational and resource type, which affect the quality of CSR implementation (correlation of barriers and effectiveness 0.20). Using the t-test, it was found that the assessment of the effectiveness of CSR initiatives differs significantly between students (average score 3.9), teachers (3.6) and administration (3.3), which emphasizes the difference in the perception of social responsibility among stakeholders.

Students rated CSR initiatives the lowest (3.4), faculty slightly higher (3.8), and administration highest (4.2). These differences are statistically significant, indicating varying levels of awareness and engagement among stakeholder groups.

The scientific novelty of the study is determined by the quantitative assessment of CSR practices in Ukrainian HEIs, taking into account the opinions of three key groups of participants. The results confirmed the importance of implementing sustainable development and environmental responsibility practices in higher education.

The conclusions allowed to formulate several recommendations. In the future, attention should be increased to the development of systemic CSR strategies that cover both environmental and social aspects, considering the high assessment of sustainable initiatives (4.1) and environmental measures (4.0). It is advisable to implement transparent management practices that meet European standards (e.g. ESG approaches), with an emphasis on ethical leadership, openness of decisions and accountability to stakeholders.

Internal communication within the university environment should be strengthened to encourage greater participation of students and teachers in volunteer programs. This can be achieved by creating internal platforms for sharing initiatives, information campaigns and material or academic incentives for participants. In addition, it is important to implement transparent management practices, which are highly valued in the European educational area.

Suggestions for future research

The study also opened new directions for studying this issue. In the future, the sample should be expanded and the role of social responsibility on students' academic performance and the overall image of HEIs should be determined. Future articles should also include data from different regions of Ukraine and identify regional specificities of CSR implementation. Moreover, it would be valuable to conduct longitudinal studies to explore how CSR practices in higher education institutions evolve over time and what long-term impact they have on institutional culture, stakeholder engagement, and graduate employability. Researchers could also explore the perceptions of different stakeholder groups—students, faculty, administrators, employers—about the relevance and effectiveness of CSR initiatives.

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