

# **STUDENTS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES AND IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY FROM LEBANON**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Social responsibility is a common path to go which will give the competitive advantage to the universities and students. Students create the basis for university social responsibility, yet the universities are responsible for developing and fostering the students towards being responsible. The purpose of this paper is to answer the question if the initiative towards social responsibility should be driven by the students or universities management. The current research study seeks the impact of the university social responsibility initiative laid on the performance of the universities and also on students. An appropriate sample size of 350 potential candidates currently enrolled and graduates were selected for the online survey by using SurveyMonkey. The study design was quantitative, and the questionnaire was used as data collection tool. The response of 200 sampling subjects was submitted. The questionnaire constituted the demographics information as well as itemized variables measured on 5 Point Likert scale. SPSS 19 has been used for statistical analysis. Findings of the results were calculated by applying frequency and correlation tests. The results showed that social responsibility initiatives and steps have significantly strong and positive relationship in boosting overall performance of the university. The current study suggested that the academicians should consider it to incorporate it in the study courses.*

**JEL:** M140

**KEYWORDS:** University Social Responsibility, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility, Students' Initiative, Motivation, Universities

## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**he basic concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) constitutes the importance of students. In general terms, USR constitutes the thinking and learning as well as behavioral pattern of people to focus beyond themselves and initialize caring attitude about their environment. Universities have to tell their students about current issues and make them aware of it. It would not allow the students to close their eyes for their surroundings as they did in the past and till now. There is a dire need to bring paradigmatic change in the university's thoughtfulness and their structure.

USR is a diversified concept and a common definition has not been yet presented. Due to the wide range of the subject, there are many barriers in the way of understanding USR and reaching a pinpointed clear understanding. The lack of financial resources, awareness and interest, the misconception that everyone knows already about the problems, the absence of quality control, the exclusion of students who cannot afford extremely high tuition fees (everybody should get chance of education) or even the lack of information for students and also parents about the possibilities.

Furthermore, there are in general two major challenges: there is no financial investment due to economic crisis exists in Arab nations; either there exists diversified groups with variations in their problems and needs a practical solution but till now none of the general solution has been found. There is a need for to bring change in university's school of thought and mindset that leads to proactive USR results in controlling, monitoring as well as ensuring it to be the integral part of daily life which in future will become a habit.

In this study, the research question focuses that should students' initiative towards social responsibility be self-motivated or should it be driven by the universities' management?"

This research study has the following research objectives: 1:) To check the motivational level and constructive performance of students in universities actively involves in social responsibility. 2:) To understand the role of USR in student's personal development. 3:) To verify students awareness towards universities initiatives taken in Lebanon.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate social responsibility is a wider concept which not only focuses on the company's obligations towards the society. Other than the corporate sector, educational institutions especially universities are socially responsible for bringing up the change till the roots of the society. The importance of developing social and personal responsibility in universities and colleges is not a new concept. Already in the 1940s, there have been studies which emphasize on the importance of raising awareness among the students, faculty and universities and educational institutions administration (Reason, 2013).

Corporate social obligation has been characterized by numerous creators, establishments and enterprises differently due to its dimension measurement nature. On the other hand, Parliamentary Joint Committee on corporations and financial services (PJC, 2006) characterized CSR as "the company considering, managing and balancing the economic, social and environmental impact of its activities". Munasinghe and Kumara (2013) clarified that CSR offers organizations a methods by which they can oversee and impact the disposition and view of their partners, building their trust and empowering the advantages of positive connections to convey business focal points.

Barnett (2007) contended that CSR prompts reliability that fortifies the association with essential partner, in this manner diminishing the exchange cost and prompts monetary benefit. Furthermore, CSR prompts benefit as set by numerous researchers (Beurden and Gössling, 2008; Boaventura, Silva, and Bandeira -de-Mello, 2012; Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Orlitzky, Schmidt, and Rynes, 2003). A few researchers trusted the relationship in the middle of CSR and corporate money related execution (CFP) is negative (Brammer, Brooks, and Pavelin, 2006; Wright and Ferris, 1997) and some few trusted that the relationship is nonpartisan (Fauzi and Idris, 2009; McWilliams and Siegel, 2000).

The core concept arises from the thought that "Educating the mind without educating the heart is not education at all"- Aristoteles Social responsibility is an ethical ideology that proposes that an individual or an organization has an obligation to act to benefit society at large (Brodeur, 2013). A company's awareness of other's expectations towards social groups keeping also earth (both biological also social) to which it works, known as corporate social obligation. Organizations express this citizenship through: 1:) Waste and contamination diminishment courses, 2:) Helping instructive also social programs, 3:) Procuring sufficient returns on the utilized assets.

Christian (2004) characterizes CSR Likewise "a totally voluntary, corporate driven activity will Push oceans an substitute to regulation during whichever An national or global level". Dusuki and Dar (2005) contended that Corporate Social Responsibilities layout the standard of conduct to which a firm must

subscribe to effect society in a positive and a beneficial way in the meantime as keeping qualities which prohibit benefit looking for at any cost.

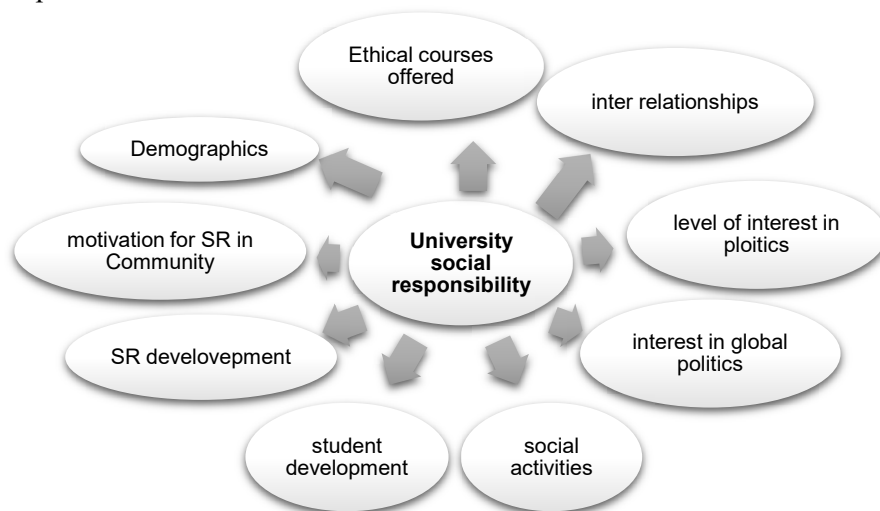
Colleges and universities have a considerable impact on the development of student’s personal and social responsibility (Sibbel, 2009). Furthermore, students go to college with high expectations of the enhancement of their self-understanding and self-development. The awareness about the importance of teaching and transmitting social and personal responsibility to the students is core of USR, but gap still lies between how it should be taught and practiced at campuses (Dey & Associates, 2009; 2010a; 2010b).

The concept of Personal and Social Responsibility (PSR) was introduced by Knepfelkemp and Hersh which was later redefined by Dey and Associates (Reason, 2013). According to Hill and his colleagues (2003), presented an exact definition of CSR is hard to pin down because beliefs and attitudes about the nature of the relationship between business and society fluctuate with the relevant issues of the day.

The PSR is divided into five dimensions: 1:) Striving for excellence, 2:) Cultivating academic integrity, 3:) Contributing to a larger community, 4:) Taking seriously the perspective of others and 5:) Developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning and action (Boyd & Brackmann, 2012; Glass, 2013; Ryder & Mitchell, 2013).

The knowledge given to the students in the university is to not only equipped of the technical skills but also to make them socially responsible students so that they might not engage in activities known to improve civic knowledge and skills at acceptable rates, even with increased attention on civic learning and community engagement (McTighe Musil, 2012). On the basis of extensive literature review and theoretical foundations Figure 1 presents the conceptual model to study the impact of USR initiatives on University Performance.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



**METHODOLOGY**

The current study follows the quantitative approach and cross sectional in nature. The study is survey based. The population of study was the current and graduated students of Lebanese Universities. The questionnaire consists of how USR practices are implemented in a specific university in Lebanon.

An appropriate sample size of 350 potential candidates currently enrolled and graduates were selected for the online survey by using SurveyMonkey that was conducted during January 2015. The study design was quantitative, and the questionnaire was used as data collection tool. The response of 200 sampling subjects

was submitted (response rate: 57%). The questionnaire constituted the demographics information as well as itemized variables measured on 5 Point Likert scale. SPSS 19 has been used for statistical analysis.

For the research quantitative data was used, divided into demographic variables measured on categorical scale and items of variables measured on Likert scale. The demographic variables were used to distinct the group whereas the Likert scale questions were used to answer the research question.

The questionnaire was distributed online via SurveyMonkey and responses were approached through LinkedIn, Facebook and WhatsApp. The age of the respondents varies including 18.3% between 18 and 21, 50.7% between 21 and 26 and remaining 22% were above 26. There were 56.6% participants were male and remaining 43.7% were female. In general it is normally distributed for a demographic variable.

Most of the participants (60.6%) already graduated from university. On the contrary, the least are juniors with 8.5%. In general the response of sophomore (9.9%) and junior students is respectfully lower than the one of senior students (21.1%). This can also be related to the distribution of age which shows the least amount of participants is in between 18-21 years old. About two thirds of the participants are either enrolled or have already graduated from a Bachelor's degree while one third is enrolled or graduated from a Master degree.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After reaching a certain amount of responses to have a reliable sample size, the outcome was analyzed according to frequency and correlation to test the relationship between the variables. This reflects the general behavior of society that more people get a Bachelor's degree than Master's degree. More than 61% agree and totally agree that they have a pre-existing idea about social responsibility representing that most of the sample was aware of the meaning of social responsibility. The majority of the respondents totally agrees (50.7%) and agrees (33.8%) that colleges are an important factor for student's development. Only 4.2% totally disagree showing the high percentage of agreement and total agreement leads to the insight that students and graduates are aware of the importance which colleges play in their development (Graphs in Annexure A).

The majority, with 52.1%, agrees that their university takes action to help the students to develop social and personal responsibility and universities already take steps to develop students' social and personal responsibility but there is room for improvement as the relatively high percentage in disagreement shows. To the statement if professors motivate students to grow beyond themselves, 55% either totally agree or agree whereas 23.9% totally disagree or disagree. 21.1% are indifferent.

The distribution of this question can be related to the fact that respondents visit different universities and the quality of professors differ. Moreover, motivation also depends on the person himself. The majority of participants (56.3%) totally disagrees, disagrees or is indifferent to the statement if university motivates them to participate in the community. This brings up the conclusion that universities have to improve in this field and encourage students to get actively involved in the community.

A large majority with 63.4% totally agrees or agrees that the respondents usually participate in social activities and can be interpreted that the motivation to participate in social activities or the community derives from the students themselves, neither than from universities. The majority of the sample has had the chance to take one or more ethical courses (57.8%) which leads to the assumption that the quantity of offers of universities is sufficient but there is a lack of quality shown in the previous questions, where participants showed that they don't feel motivated to get actively involved in social responsibility activities. The distribution is more or less equal for every answer criteria. This could be due to the fact that participants might have had chances to take courses outside but did not take them. Another explanation is that

respondents do not want to spend free time on social responsibility due to a lack of recognition in the importance of this issue. Moreover there could be a difference in the offering of ethical courses depending on the different regions and cities the participants and the universities are located.

49.3% crossed totally agree and 25.4% agree on the statement that good relationships between students themselves and also between the students and the professors matter for the learning outcome. The majority of respondents either totally disagrees or disagrees with 47.9% that universities support political interest. The distribution can be explained by students attending different universities which focus on other topics or emphasize various subjects. Furthermore, the personalities and interests of the students have to be considered and some might also have a pre-existing interest from family background and are therefore more driven to gain knowledge about sustainability.

The outcome of Student satisfaction of cooperation between University and companies shows 19.7% total agreement, so there is room for improvement, which also refers to the companies. They should put more focus on cooperation because every student is a potential employee. The distribution of the answers of Student satisfaction of offering guest lecturers is similar to the previous statements and might be also caused by the same reasons.

Investments of University in SR issues should increase by 28.2% totally agree, which shows an interest of the students in social responsibility and their wish that the university puts more effort in such issues. Only 7% totally disagree, which either can mean they are not interested in social responsibility or that they are completely satisfied with their university's investment.

Overall respect of University to its commitment to community and plays vital role in SR is totally agreed and agrees are answered by each 23.9%, indifferent by 28.2%, disagree by 18.3%. After the statements the students were asked to value their leisure time according to how much time they spend on activities such as family, friends, work, sports, playing an instrument and community service. Time spending on friends and family and sports was also evaluated. Time spending on community service is similar as on hobbies. Students do not spend a lot of time or most of their time serving their community. This is confirmed by all of the previous outcomes.

Correlation is a statistic measure to show how two variables relate to each other. If the variables are positively correlated, one moves up the other one does the same, they move in the same direction. If they are negatively correlated, they move in the opposite direction which means if one moves up, the other one move down (Investopedia, LLC, 2015).

The age of the respondents is highly correlated to the level of education and degree of education of the respondents (0.641 with a significance of 0.003) and (0.483 with a significance of 0.000) respectively. The result comes from the fact that with higher age, students reach a higher level of education, this is a logical consequence. The age is also highly correlated with the. The reason is the same like mentioned above. For a Master's degree one has to have a Bachelor's degree first, and both degrees need time.

Colleges as an important factor for student's development is positively correlated (0.262 with a significance of 0.027) to the gender of the students. There is a negative correlation between the major of education and the increase in interest in local politics since the university has been entered (-0.328 with a significance of 0.005). This reveals that the choice of major has nothing to do with the increase in interest in local politics. Also, it might show that universities do not encourage the students to participate in local politics.

A possible explanation is that politics are a sensitive subject in Lebanon, differently than in other parts of the world, like Germany or the United States. Also, it should not depend on the major; there should rather be a general interest in politics. The same phenomena can be observed regarding the negative correlation

between the major of education and the increase in interest in global politics (-0.211 with a significance 0.077).

Nevertheless, the degree of education and the increasing interest in local politics show a positive correlation (0.254 with a significance of 0.033), so one can come up with the conclusion that the more advanced students are in their studies, the more they are interested in such issues. Again, a similar correlation is shown regarding the increase in interest in global politics.

Pre-existing idea about social responsibility is highly correlated to the statement that colleges are an important factor for students' development (0.591 with a significance of 0.000). This can be explained by the fact that students who already have an idea about this subject, from either their previous school, the community or from their family, value the importance of colleges in their lives more.

Furthermore pre-existing idea about social responsibility is positively correlated to the statement that universities take action to help students to develop social responsibility and personal responsibility (0.376 with a significance of 0.001). Again, students with a pre-existing idea about social responsibility see the big picture and understand the meaning behind it. Students who do not have such a developed pre-existing idea about social responsibility yet might not be aware of the sense behind participating in the offers from the universities. Therefore, they do not value them as much as the other students.

Students with a pre-existing idea about social responsibility also correlate highly positive to the participation in social activities (0.382 with a significance of 0.001). This means that students who are aware of the meaning of social responsibility are more likely to participate in social activities than students without such an idea. In this case the hypothesis is supported that the motivation to act socially in the community should be derived from the students themselves.

In addition, pre-existing idea about social responsibility and taking chances to take ethical courses outside the universities are highly correlated (0.332 with a significance of 0.005). This is an indicator that the motivation to participate and engage in social activities in the community comes from the students themselves. Otherwise, they might not spend their free time on such events. This also shows a certain general interest in social responsibility.

The statements that colleges are an important factor for students' development and universities should spend more time and resources to get students involved actively in social responsibility are positively correlated (0.257 with a significance of 0.030). As students are aware of this fact, they wish for the universities to put more resources in these subjects. This leads to the insight that the motivation to develop in a socially responsible way comes from within the students themselves but they need the universities to support them in this development because it cannot be done by them alone. They need someone to lead, guide and provide options during their development.

The previous correlations of the statements are in favor of the hypothesis that the initiative to get actively involved in social responsibility should derive from the students themselves. In contrast to these statements, the outcome shows other correlations supporting the hypothesis that the universities are responsible to take the initiative to motivate their students to act socially responsible.

First, universities take action to help students to develop social and personal responsibility is highly correlated to the statement that colleges are an important factor for students' development (.368 with a significance of .002). In case the universities put more effort in the development of social and personal responsibility, students feel more satisfied and therefore agree to the statement that colleges are an important factor in their development. This could lead to the conclusion that the motivation to develop personal and social responsibility should arise from the universities.

The educational level of the respondents is highly negatively correlated (-0.315 with a significance of 0.007) to the participation in social activities. This means that by reaching a higher level of education, the participation does not increase but it moreover decreases. A reason might be that students are more occupied with their studies, or also their work, and therefore have a shortage of time or energy to participate actively in such social activities.

Another possible explanation could be that universities have failed to transmit the importance of participating in social activities earlier and this gap cannot be closed anymore for this generation of students. This supports the hypothesis that universities play a vital role in encouraging students to participate in social responsibility issues. If universities are not able to motivate the students, they will lose interest in social responsibility (Furze, 2010).

Another positive correlation exists between the statements that colleges are an important factor for students' development and that professors motivate students to grow beyond themselves (0.286 with a significance of 0.016). Here, one can see that the interpersonal relationships between students and their professors play an important role also in the students' development. A possible explanation is that professors are often seen, and should also act, as role models for the students. This supports the hypothesis that universities are responsible for students to act socially. The task of the universities is to hire experienced and competence staff, so that not only technical knowledge is transferred, but also skills and competences are transmitted.

There is a highly positive correlation between professors motivating students to grow beyond themselves and the universities taking action to help students to develop social and personal responsibility (0.577 with a significance of 0.000). In universities, which encourage students a lot to participate in social activities, the professors share the intention to motivate the students in this issue. It shows that there has to be common basis between the declared goal of the universities, as well as in the interests of the professors to transmit values which develop social responsibility, so that students are successfully motivated to participate in the community. A similar high positive correlation exists between professors motivating students to grow beyond themselves and the universities motivating the students to participate in the community (0.636). Reasons are the same like mentioned above.

This explanation is supported by the fact that there is an even higher positive correlation between universities motivating students to participate in the community and universities taking action to help students to develop social and personal responsibility (0.690 with a significance of 0.000).

Moreover, the positive correlation between universities taking action to help students and the participation in social activities (0.256 with a significance 0.031) shows the important role of the universities in this matter. If there is no offer for the students to participate in, they simply cannot participate. Again, this underlines the hypothesis that universities play a key role in the development of a social sense among their students.

The degree of education correlates highly positive with the increasing interest in community contribution since entered university (0.341 with a significance of 0.008). This underlines that universities play an important role in getting students interested in such activities. Further, it points out that universities are already able to motivate their students to be active in community activities. This is something positive and supports the hypothesis that motivation comes from the universities. This hypothesis is proven by the positive correlation between degree of education and increasing interest in sustainability (0.281 with a significance of 0.018).

Yet, it is shown that the major of education and the increasing interest in sustainability are negatively correlated (-0.294 with a significance of 0.013). This leads to the insight that the choice of major does not

influence the student’s interest in sustainability. Moreover, it shows that sustainability is a topic which is important for everyone and not dependent on a major.

The two statements that universities take action to develop social and personal responsibility and the increasing interest in sustainability are highly positively correlated (0.392 with a significance of 0.001). Here, the important role is shown universities play to students. This underlines again the hypothesis that the motivation should derive from the universities.

Table 1: Correlations among Variables

	Education	Student Development	Personal Responsibilities	Social Activity	Ethical Course	Social +Personal Responsibilities	Universities
Age	0.641 0.003						
Gender		0.262 0.027					
Local Politics	-0.328 0.005						
Global Politics	-0.211 0.077						
Social Responsibilities		0.257	0.376				
Social+Personal Responsibilities		0.030 0.368	0.001	0.382 0.001	0.332 0.005		0.256 0.031
Social Activities	-0.315 0.007	0.002					
Professor motivation		0.286					
Community contribution		0.016				0.577 0.000	
Sustainability	0.341 0.008						
Increase Interest in Sustainability	0.281 0.018 -0.294						
	0.013					0.392 0.001	

*This table summarizes the results of the statistical work conducted on the correlation level. Only variables with strong correlation were mentioned i.e those variables having a coefficient that varies between 0.01 and 0.05. Although most variables have positive correlations, Interest in Local and Global politics are negatively related to the level of education.*

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

After the evaluation of the outcome the research question can be answered in the following way. The numeration of the questions refers to the questionnaire which can be found in the appendix. On the one hand a big part of the motivation has to derive from the students themselves. If someone is not interested in participating in social responsibility activities, he will not get active no matter how many courses or activities are offered by the universities. Furthermore students have to be willing, ready and open-minded towards the issue otherwise they will never internalize the concept and start to apply it on a regular basis.

On the other hand students agreed that universities are essential for their personal development also concerning their notion of social responsibility. The study has also shown that the interest increases in the course of their studies which can be seen as evidence that the initiative should come from the university. The universities have to constantly improve their offerings and actions regarding social responsibility especially in a practical attempt. They should take on a motivating and active role to get students involved. There is a need to encourage students to become active parts of the society and stop them from being passive. As a result it is necessary to have a systemized program, projects and proactive solutions. They have to understand that it is not only the economic aspect, and maximizing profits are worth considering



but that it is also important to take care of all stakeholders including the community. The student must be educated to not only be beneficial for the company but also for the community and society.

The study has also shown that if there are interesting possibilities for students to learn about social responsibility and get involved, they are more satisfied with the university itself and more motivated to apply their knowledge. Another important result that was shown by the study is that if universities fail to motivate their students, they will lose interest which emphasizes the role of the university to be the main driver in social responsibility.

To sum it all up as the terminology “social” already points out, it is an issue concerning both students and universities. Personal students motivation is however required because without their interest as a base, the university has no chance of getting them involved. Nevertheless the development and initialization depends on the university. There is a need to establish a fundamental interest in and recognition of the importance of the issue to ensure that students become socially responsible citizens.

Social responsibility should be on a daily schedule and become a habit. This is a task that primarily the university needs to approach in co- operation with the students. There is definitely need for improvement and a change of mind- set. It is extremely important that the university makes social responsibility a central part of education and also in pre- educational institutions the focus should be on the issue. This focus will also help to make their students internalize the importance of the concept and therefore more likely to appreciate the offers of their university. Everyone has to work together - it is not a question of either or from where the motivation should derive.

This outcome is after the evaluation of the survey neither surprising nor satisfying. There is a need for change, both in the minds of the students as well as in the universities implementation and application of social responsibility issues. Awareness of the importance has to be increased on both sides.

#### Limitations of the study

The sample size is relatively small; this should be improved to get a better overview. Further, the distribution of the questionnaire was exclusively online, via Facebook or WhatsApp. This causes the effect that it is in some cases unclear if the survey has been done conscientiously which is a hurdle to generalize the results. Another limitation is that the research has been done by foreigners who are not familiar with the habits and circumstances in Lebanon. Due to limited time for the whole project, the width of the survey had to be reduced. Another limitation is the lack in financial resources and help.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

While this research included both enrolled and also graduated students, there is a need for a study which is exclusively done among graduated students. This would give a more detailed idea of what should be improved. Further, every university should regularly do an internal survey among their enrolled students to find out what the students desire and how it can be improved. The repeated surveys can also help the universities to check their progresses in this issue.

Further surveys should not only be distributed online but also personally by for example visiting different universities and giving the questionnaires directly to the students and make them fill out the questionnaires immediately. This could also have effects on the results because the students could ask the distributors of the questionnaires if something is unclear and that way respond in a more honest way. For future studies different variables impact can be studied by using more sophisticated analysis methods/models.

Appendix A: University Social Responsibility (USR) Instrument

Age:  18-21  22-26  +26

Gender:  Male  Female

Name of University: \_\_\_\_\_

Major:  Business  Engineering  Humanities  Medical Science  Others

Current Semester:  Sophomore  Junior  Senior

Degree of Studies:  Bachelor  Master

**Do you Agree to the following statements? (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)**

	1	2	3	5	5
1 Have a pre-existing idea about social responsibility					
2 Colleges are an important factor for student to develop social and personal responsibility.					
3 My university takes action to help me develop social and personal responsibility.					
4 My professors motivate me to grow beyond myself.					
5 My university motivates me to participate in the community.					
6 I usually participate in social activities.					
7 During my higher education journey I got the chance to take one or more ethical courses.					
8 I intend to take or already have taken courses concerning ethics outside the university.					
9 Good relationships between students-students and students-instructors matter for any learning outcomes especially getting actively involved in social responsibility.					
10 Since you have entered university, did you interest/participation rate in the following subjects increase					
Local politics					
Global politics					
Sustainability					
Community contributions					
11 Assess the following activities which you practice besides university according to how much time you spend on					
Work					
Time with family					
Time with friends					
Sports					
Playing an instrument					
Community Service					
12 I am satisfied with the offer of my university concerning					
Ethical courses					
Courses which develop your personal competences (e.g. presentation skills)					
Cooperation between university and companies					
Guest lecture especially on National and Global concern issues					
13 I do actively participate in offers from the university like mentioned above					
14 My university has to put more time and resources to get students involved in socially responsibility issues					
15 I believed my university overall respects its commitment to the community and plays a vital role in social responsibility					

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