

Comparative Analysis of the Social Responsibility of Universities in the UK and Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The scientific project addresses the issue of social responsibility of Kazakhstani and British universities. It is not for nothing that today the social responsibility of universities is seen as the third mission after education and research. We believe that this is a reflection of the growing influence of universities on the development of society and states, and, most importantly, an increase in requirements for the quality of Education. On this issue, a comparative analysis of the medium and long-term development strategies, plans and other current regulations of universities selected as case studies was carried out using a content analysis approach. Interviews were conducted with persons involved in these educational institutions and a review of the practical implementation of the University's social responsibility was conducted. The analysis shows that in the documents outlined by the goals of some Kazakhstani universities today little attention is paid to many aspects of Social Responsibility, whereas in some, on the contrary, there is a high experience of implementing social responsibility through the institutionalization of UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals set out in the document "transforming the world: on the agenda in the field of sustainable development until 2030" (UNESCO 2015).

Keywords: HEI Social Responsibility, Socio-Economic Development, Educational Services Quality, Strategic University Planning, Public Expectations Evolution.

Introduction

The problem of the HEI (higher education institution) social responsibility is obvious. Those working in the field of higher education daily face one or another of its implications. Today, the HEI has to answer to a variety of authorities, most often for the consequences of decisions that it had no direct involvement in making. Therefore, the question of what a socially responsible HEI is, for what it may or may not be responsible for, where it has the right to demand an answer, is a question of positioning the HEI in the social space, a question of its social mission, development strategy, and a question of management. Unfortunately, the question of HEI social responsibility is scarcely studied by modern Kazakh science (Taizhanov et al., 2016). The analysis of responsibility as a social phenomenon, as a rule, is conducted from philosophical attitudes, while the needs of practice require an interdisciplinary approach to this problem. Despite the widespread use of the very term of social responsibility of higher education, we were unable to find papers where this problem would be posed as the subject of scientific research. On the scale of the European educational space, there is also an ambiguous attitude towards the new social mission of higher education. Calls for HEI social responsibility began to sound when the universities were at the center of a network of organizations related to education. There was a need for a balance between the activities of universities for the benefit of society and their entrepreneurship. The Bucharest Declaration concerning Ethical Values and Principles of Higher Education in Europe (2004) confirmed the need to continue the course towards creating a mechanism for the social responsibility of higher education institutions that ensures "a balance between the public good and commercialization". In order for the policy of social responsibility to serve as "support for effective socio-economic institutions" in the field of higher

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education, one factor is missing – the HEIs must have the degree of autonomy that would allow them to act as “free” and in this sense as responsible business entities.

Today, society expects not only high-quality goods and services at an acceptable price, but also social stability. The HEI is a subject of the social state, therefore it must function according to the given rules. We made an attempt to define the social responsibility of the university.

Modern universities, as a rule, are city-forming enterprises with a good public image. Being a corporation of high social responsibility, HEIs not only provide high quality educational services, but also actively participate in ensuring the social stability of the region.

Regional universities can operate fairly and effectively in such areas as the protection of the environment, health care and protection of the rights of the population. To do this, they need to turn part of their resources into the benefits of society, and to do this systematically, on a large scale, in relevant directions and without bias in the field of politics and religion (Kirillova, 2007; Bazarbayev et al., 2016; Karayev et al., 2016; Nassimov et al., 2013).

Social responsibility principles are formed based on public expectations. Recently, public expectations have changed significantly. Society has become more concerned by how an organization or institution conducts its activities, what they are guided by and how they manage their income. In order to meet the expectations of society, it is necessary to develop an action program related to the observance of ethical, legal, charitable, environmental, commercial and public principles. In other words, it is about how to become a worthy corporate member of civil society. A common understanding is being formed in society that social policy should be absolutely transparent for citizens. Gone are the days when strategies and programs were developed behind closed doors. The formation of public opinion regarding the business and public image of the organization stimulates leaders who claim long-term success, good name and great prestige to be serious about civilized methods of activity.

Literature Review

The approaches presented in the scientific literature to the assessment of social responsibility of higher education institution and its contribution to the socio-economic development of the region are quite different from each other. According to the narrow context of social responsibility, the main direction of universities' work is to contribute to the socio-economic development of regions, primarily through training and strengthening the potential of university science (Godonoga & Sporn, 2022). Other researchers consider social responsibility in a broad aspect, as one of the social functions of the university (Perfileva, 2011). At the same time, they emphasize a special focus of universities' activities on the needs of society in general and individual citizens in particular, together with an active social position of universities with regard to their territory. This approach is determined by the results of the analysis of the development of foreign systems of higher education, which justify the need to develop the ethics of corporate social responsibility of universities. For example, in Scandinavian countries the third role of universities is legislated and the social responsibility and ethics of universities are developed and approved in a similar way to business structures (Yessenali et. al, 2024; Gulmira, et. al, 2024). Proponents of this interpretation raise the question of the need for a broader concept of the social mission of universities. This concept today is the basis for determining the social responsibility of higher education as a key priority of national educational policy in some foreign countries, particularly in Finland (Vakhstein, 2005; Paridinova & Kaldybay, 2020).

It is important for the analysis of the social functions of universities to include concepts that clarify their specificity and peculiarity. These are such widely used concepts as "third mission," "social responsibility," "community engagement," and "social engagement". Anyhow, each of the concepts emphasizes a special focus of universities' activities: focus on the needs of society as a whole and individual citizens, in particular, including those who live in separate territories or united in separate communities; or the active social position of universities in relation to their territory. By integrating the considered scientific-theoretical and practical approaches in the aspect of problems, it is logical to conclude that the category "social responsibility" determines the essence and content meaning of the concept "social responsibility of higher

education institution". The following functions of higher education institution implementing the principle of socially responsible institute are determined:

social intelligence reproduction - providing society with educational services directed directly to human service and free human development;

training highly qualified personnel (elite of society) - one of the decisive factors in the development of the education system as a whole, as well as ensuring scientific and technical and socio-economic progress of the country;

Labor market formation - new knowledge created in an educational institution has a direct impact on the labor market, forcing to re-evaluate the importance of certain professional skills, changing the quantitative and qualitative requirements to labor resources;

development of culture and behavior patterns, the presence and observance of which largely determines the psychological climate in the university and its market capitalization;

Social relations stabilization - an educational institution acts as an active participant in social interactions with interested parties and many representatives of the social environment of the region. This is realized through the creation of expert-advisory councils and associations, preparation of analytical information for legislators, development of proposals to change or adopt federal and regional laws, implementation of social programs, especially on a voluntary basis, public awareness of its successes and challenges (Charles, 2003; Kelgembayeva, et al., 2024).

The social responsibility of the university should adhere to the following principles:

Openness

Transparency. The principles of conducting social policy, social programs and mechanisms for their implementation should be clear and understandable.

Publicity. Any information about the university social responsibility, except for confidential information, must be made available to the public.

Reliability. Concealment or falsification of data on the university social responsibility is unacceptable.

Dialog. Social policy is built on the basis of a dialogue with all interested parties, feedback from the recipients of social programs is mandatory.

Systematicity. Directivity. Availability of priority areas for the social programs implementation.

Unity in time (consistency). Responsibility for current and past activities, as well as for the future impact of the university's social responsibility activities on the outside world.

Unity in space. Regularity. Refusal of single and fragmented actions in favor of systematic programs and projects within the priority areas of a socially responsible university.

Integratedness. Penetration of the principles of a socially responsible university into the decision-making process at all hierarchical levels.

Significance. Relevance. The implemented programs of a socially responsible university should be timely and in demand.

Large scale. The programs of a socially responsible university should reach a significant audience and be visible to society as a whole.

Efficiency. The funds spent on the program implementation should tangibly help in solving problems, while the results of the programs are subject to regular evaluation and accounting.

Conflict avoidance. Political non-involvement. Non-participation in election races, support of political parties or individual political figures.

Distancing from religion. Refusal to support the clergy, individual denominations or religious movements.

Refusal To Support Nationalist Movements

The social activity of the university is expressed in the implementation of various social programs, both internal and external. Distinctive features of social activity programs are the voluntary basis of their implementation, systemic nature and connection with the university mission and development strategy. Such a university has the right to call itself socially responsible, which means that it operates according to the principles of social responsibility and implements a set of social programs in areas that are of priority for it.

Following the thesis on the social responsibility of the HEI proclaimed in the documents of the Bologna process, modern Kazakhstani universities play an important role in determining the main parameters of society, performing the function of a regulator of the formation, change and maintenance of social structures:

responsibly implement their key function - the transfer of knowledge, skills from generation to generation, without which society cannot maintain its existence and develop;

engage in scientific activities, the results of which largely determine the development of society;

leave to society high-level professionals in popular specialties, without whose participation the national economy and culture do not function, safety and security (including environmental and computer) are not ensured;

train the elite in the field of politics, economics, science, culture, on which the development of society depends;

contribute to the erosion of social barriers, making higher education as accessible as possible, removing barriers to higher education for all who have the appropriate abilities, regardless of social, economic and geographical factors.

The main projects that allow talking about the social responsibility of the university include:

educational (training of high-level specialists, the university is a center for training, retraining and certification of personnel in the region);

implementation of legislation in the field of social assistance and social support;

cultural (organization of mass cultural events, participation in city, oblast, regional and republican competitions, festivals, creative meetings with outstanding figures of Kazakhstani and foreign culture).

sports (competitions in various sports, a program for physical training and sports development);

health care and ecology (introduction of modern information technologies into scientific-practical activities, training of highly qualified personnel and postgraduate improvement of health workers in the city and oblast, introduction of scientific developments in environmental protection);

in the field of high technologies;

public;

employment of graduates;

assistance to low-income population;

major construction (provision of housing for employees and teachers, hostel for students and undergraduates);

international.

The social responsibility of the university is based on the balance of interests of all stakeholders of the educational process (applicant, HEI, state, public). Tasks in the field of social policy implementation include:

Ensuring effectiveness of social programs and reasonable mechanisms for the public contribution of the university to the development of society;

Development of approaches to the social responsibility of the HEI, based on generally accepted international principles of social responsibility and offering forms of implementation of the policy of social responsibility, taking into account the peculiarities of Kazakhstan;

Improving the level and quality of life of the population through the introduction and implementation of social responsibility by the university;

Achieving total information transparency and awareness in all areas of the university.

Methodology and Methods

This research has taken a qualitative approach using content analysis (Low, Samkin & Li, 2015; Kaldybay, et al., 2024), a method of which we have been using for a long time. According to Hennink et al. (2020) a qualitative research allows for a detailed study of people's experiences using a particular set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, direct observation, and content analysis because interpretation and observation in understanding the social world are important integral components of qualitative research. Thus, qualitative methodology allows the use of documents as the main source for researchers to get an overall picture of a subject's actions, and content analysis is a standard textual research method (Prasad, 2008; Sanat, et al., 2022) that involves codifying qualitative and quantitative information into different categories based on selected criteria.

According to Krippendorff (2019), content analysis is "a research method for creating reproducible and valid inferences from data according to its context." Furthermore, content analysis can lead to reproducible and valid inferences from texts for a set of circumstances around a situation other than the original situation. The process behind content analysis provides the text or texts as inputs and the topic as outputs.

The main source of data for the analysis in this research is a strategic plan released by a selection sample of Kazakhstan's public universities. The analysis was carried out between October and November 2024. The research work was structured into four main steps:

selecting a sample of universities to be surveyed;

collection of strategic plans of the selected universities published on the websites of the respective institutions;

analyzing the strategic plans against precisely defined benchmarks;

illustrating the process and findings through tables.

As for the population, a total of 125 universities have been identified in Kazakhstan in 2024, including 33 public and 92 private universities. We chose public universities because they have social obligations in addition to legal and economic ones, while private organizations usually seek mainly economic benefits. In addition, private universities have some differences in terms of legal frameworks, funding sources, resource management, and disclosure requirements compared to public universities. Therefore, based on a population of 33 public universities, in our selection we included 2 large public universities (ranging from 6,000 to 17,000 students), considering their importance in the national scenario. On each institution's website, we searched for the most recent version of the strategic plan published since 2019 to examine only documents prepared after the approval of the National Development Plan 2025, which have been taken into account in the content analysis.

Table 1. Lists the Public Universities of Kazakhstan Which Have Been Designated For Analysis Along With the Main Characteristics of the Selection

Nº	University	Region	Years	Volume
1	Abai Kaznpu	Almaty	2022-2025	26
2	Khoja Ahmed Yassawi international Kazakh-Turkish university	Turkestan	2022-2026	62

Results and Discussion

The objective of the research was to investigate the degree of integration of social responsibility issues in the planning documents of Kazakh public universities. In particular, we have investigated the space currently reserved by universities for strategic objectives concerning social responsibility themes in the main strategic planning document of academic institutions: the strategic plan. The final goal was to provide additional information about the current level of integration of social responsibility ideas in the strategic activities of universities, as well as information about the dimensions of social responsibility most often considered by universities in their planning documents.

We were able to find an answer to the question of how integrated social responsibility is in the development strategies of the selected Kazakhstani state universities by analyzing the content.

Of course, in the development plans of universities, the mission, values, strategic directions are outlined very brilliantly, but the internal weaknesses of the University in terms of SWOT analysis make it doubtful that the university provides quality education in general.

Nº	University	Values	Mission	Visions	Strategic directions
1	Abai Kaznpu	1. professionalism, 2. responsibility, 3. honesty 4. engagement 5. student-centricity 6. leadership	"We train teachers who anticipate the needs of modern education on the basis of advanced methods, national heritage and world approaches.	Abai University in 2025 is the leader of teacher education in Central Asia. Asia, workshop of teachers of a new formation.	1. center of academic excellence 2. pedagogical research university 3. open university 4. socially responsible university 5. the university involved 6. digital university 7. effective university 8. friendly campus

			We raise the prestige of the teaching profession and act as a driver of human capital development		
2	Khoja Ahmed Yassawi international Kazakh-Turkish university	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partnership and respect 2. Transparency and trust 3. Fairness and honesty 4. Competence and diligence 5. Innovation and adaptability 	From deep roots to a bright future	International Kazakh-Turkish University named after Khoja Ahmed Yasawi to turn Turkestan into a common educational center of the Turkic world	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvement of the university management system; 2. achieving leadership positions in transformation in academic activities; 3. development of an integrated model of academic, scientific and clinical training of medical personnel 4. development of the ecosystem of science and innovation; 5. contribution to the development of society and the region; 6. development of infrastructure and resources of the university; 7. "Turkestan is the spiritual capital of the Turkic world"

Conclusion

Based on the results of the content analysis of documents and conducted interviews with representatives of universities (vice-rectors, professors and graduate students) in assessing the proposed components of social responsibility, it can be generally concluded that, as of today, Kazakhstani universities in most cases still pay little attention in their planning documents to the goals related to various aspects of social responsibility. The analysis revealed a low conformity of universities' strategic plans with the 17 goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By contrast, all the British universities we have visited during our research internship, have demonstrated that they use the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda for the period up to 2030 as a guide for preparing their strategic plans. Such was the case with the University of Bath, Arts University Bournemouth, Brunel University of London, University of Westminster, London Metropolitan University, University College London, University of Oxford, University of Bristol and Falmouth University. In addition, these universities tend to join various networks aimed at promoting sustainable development.

This project has been subject to limitations. The first limitation stems from the qualitative methodology used. Therefore, whereas the research method of content analysis was able to determine whether universities included actions in their planning documents that addressed social responsibility issues and in

which aspects of social responsibility had more resources invested, it was unable to demonstrate whether the results reflected the policies that universities had implemented as part of the university's social responsibility.

In other words, the method used had the limitation of presenting simply the number of key references to the subject matter under study, without displaying the actual dimensions of whatever has been achieved. That means, for example, that universities that pay more attention to social responsibility in their strategic plans might be the same universities that fail to implement social responsibility policies in concrete actions. In contrast, universities that place less emphasis on social responsibility issues in their planning documents might be more involved in social responsibility policies and concrete actions. An additional limitation of the analysis has been that it has not accounted for all Kazakhstani universities.

There is a real need for further research to better understand the extent to which social responsibility is integrated into the medium- and long-term planning processes of public sector organizations, especially in the context of universities. Further research could confirm the correspondence between the content stated by universities in their respective strategic plans concerning the measurement of social responsibility and the concrete actions they perform that improve the understanding of the current state of the university's social responsibility.

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