

Corporate Social Responsibility in Higher Education: Enhancing Graduate Employability Through Extracurricular Skill Development and Social Accountability

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between the incorporation of corporate social responsibility and extracurricular activities in tertiary institutions and graduate employability, acquisition of skills, and social responsibility. The modern literature puts an emphasis on the role of extracurricular activities in developing key competencies, which are becoming more and more desired by employers since they are the backbone of career readiness. Such activities help students improve their academic training, flexibility, and confidence, in addition to providing networking possibilities with professionals, which are likely to help them secure a job in the future. Higher education institutions have CSR programs that enhance ethical awareness, civic participation and social responsibility among learners. By having the society engaged, practicing sustainability, and being socially responsible in their research, students gain better insights into their behaviours, as well as the skills of problem-solving socially. These experiences support personal and professional development as he/she would reveal the ability to make moral decisions and positive contributions to the workplace. The study highlights the fact that students are faced with a lot of hurdles to participate in extracurricular activities and corporate social responsibility. Disadvantaged groups are unable to develop these competencies due to corporate and institutional barriers, economic inequalities and cultural limitations, thus leading to an uneven career advancement. The research suggests that Higher education institutions should implement institutional policies and frameworks of structured extracurricular activities and corporate social responsibility in their pedagogical frameworks to improve universal access through employer-community relations. Future scholars need to undertake additional cross-cultural studies to establish the effects of such activities on employability at an international level. Well-integrated and made accessible to all, extracurricular activities and corporate social responsibility programs, on an individual level, increase career opportunities and promote social development in regard to the responsible citizenship agenda of higher education.

Keywords

Corporate Social Responsibility, University Social Responsibility, Higher Education, Employability, Extracurricular Activities, Skill Development, Social Accountability

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1. Introduction

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in equipping graduates with a changing and competitive job market is becoming increasingly important. Although conventional academic programmes mainly instil subject-relevant skills, the current labour market requires more than technical skills. Employers are currently in search of graduates that have strong academic backgrounds in addition to a range of transferable skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, problem-solving skills and teamwork. Soft skills are now the keys to professional success, as they allow people to manoeuvre in a complex work setting and work with different teams in a productive manner (Javed and Srivastava, 2024; Swingler et al., 2022). To address these demands, HEIs have integrated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Extracurricular Activities (ECAs) in their courses as an effort to make them more employable.

CSR and ECAs have been credited with the capability of promoting personal and professional skills, which are of great importance to employers. HEIs CSR activities normally involve actions aimed at social well-being, e.g., sustainability projects, community service and socially responsible research. Such activities provide students with real-life experience of making ethical decisions, being socially responsible, and being a good citizen, thus making a significant contribution to the overall growth of responsible individuals (Rahman et al., 2019; Vázquez Burguete et al., 2013). Empirical data show that students who engage in CSR activities tend to develop such skills as project management, leadership, and collaboration, which are much valued by the labour market (Dahan and Senol, 2012; Green et al., 2019). Likewise, ECAs, such as volunteer work, leadership in student organisations, and sporting activities, allow students to develop transferable skills, such as teamwork, time management, and interpersonal communication, which are all required in the current competitive job environment (Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2024).

Regardless of the reported advantages of CSR and ECAs, the literature indicates the presence of an existing gap in knowledge concerning the concept of synergy in relation to the increase in employability through the activities. Although there are several studies that include the beneficial gains of every initiative separately, few studies have investigated the joint influence of CSR and ECAs on the employability of graduates. When CSR is combined with ECAs, HEIs would have an opportunity to provide students with a more holistic learning experience that would not only enhance their employability but also equip them with the skills they will be able to face in their professional careers. As an example, CSR projects involving community involvement can be combined with leadership in student organisations, and students can have the chance to acquire professional skills and social responsibility (Green et al., 2019). This integration also provides students with a platform on which they can apply the classroom information to real-life solutions and hence make their professional engagements of societal significance more appreciated.

Further, the increasing need for graduates with strong soft skills is also closely interconnected with the larger trends in labour markets. Studies show that employers are giving more focus to these competencies when hiring employees. In a survey of more than 1,000 employers, 93 per cent considered soft skills as important as technical skills in hiring new graduates (Gabriele, 2024). These results support the need to have HEIs incorporate programs like CSR and ECAs into their curricula because they offer students the rare opportunities to acquire soft skills that are essential in achieving success in the workplace. To this end, CSR and ECAs may be considered complementary policies that bring together the education/skills gap and the employment to allow students to gain interpersonal skills and technical knowledge that can be helpful in their career progression (Javed and Srivastava, 2024).

Besides professional benefits, CSR and ECAs are beneficial to advancing ethical and social responsibility-qualities that are becoming more desirable to employers in an interdependent, globally aware workforce. With the increasing networked and socially conscious labour market, employers are paying increased focus on the recruitment of graduates with a sense of global issue and willingness to contribute to the welfare of society (Rahman et al., 2019). As an illustration, graduates who have taken part in CSR programs related to environmental sustainability or poverty reduction will have a better chance of being seen as responsible and activists by potential employers (Swingler et al., 2022). Engaging in CSR and ECAs also prepare students with resiliency, flexibility, and problem-solving skills, which are important in fast-paced working environments (Suffrin, 2017).

However, although the advantages of CSR and ECAs are obvious, a number of obstacles stand in the way of fair participation, especially with marginalised students. Students with low socioeconomic backgrounds do not have access to opportunities of CSR and ECA, because of financial, cultural, and institutional constraints, to name but a few. Unpaid internships, volunteer roles, and extracurricular community services are usually associated with personal expenditures like travel expenses, which most students cannot afford (Donnelly et al., 2019; Sin et al., 2016). These barriers have led to reduced social mobility because students who are not exposed to them might be handicapped when they are in the employment market.

To circumvent these predicaments, HEIs need to embrace integrated approaches that would ensure that all students have equal access to CSR and ECA programmes regardless of their background. Financial assistance to participants (in the form of scholarships or stipends) may reduce the financial costs of participation (Nghia, 2017). Besides, it could be appropriate to provide flexible scheduling or online participation to students with limited time because of work or family commitments. By removing these barriers, every student, regardless of their disadvantaged background, will be able to enjoy the benefits of CSR and ECA programs and, therefore, society will be more equitable as well as more employable.

Moreover, the introduction of CSR and ECAs into the official course is one of the decisive measures in the direction of making them universally accessible. Some researchers insist that CSR and ECAs should not be offered as an extracurricular activity but as a mandatory part of academic training (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023; Swingler et al., 2022). This would ensure that all students, with or without socioeconomic status, attain the skills and experiences that would enhance their employability, and at the same time would ensure the coordination of these measures with overall academic goals of HEIs.

This study, therefore, aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on CSR and ECAs by investigating their joint effect on graduate employability. CSR and ECAs have a promising perspective in the strategic integration of higher education in competencies that employers demand more and more. Focusing on the aspects of participation barriers and integrating these programs into the official syllabus, the HEIs will be able to create a more inclusive educational paradigm to not only enhance the degree of employability but also foster the social responsibility among graduates. The practical implications of this study can be used by HEIs who want to optimize their employability programmes and provide an equal opportunity to every student to be equipped with the necessary skills to achieve success in the modern work environment.

The study utilises a conceptual framework, where the existing theoretical frameworks are used to question the interconnection between CSR, ECAs and employability. The general research question that will inform this research is: How do corporate social responsibility (CSR) and

extracurricular activities (EA) integration in higher education institutions relate to graduate employability, and what is the mechanism that prevents the appearance of all students to the aforementioned opportunities? To answer this question, the study assumes a central focus, which is to examine how the production of CSR and ECAs in HEIs can result in better graduate employability and social responsibility and, at the same time, reveal the barriers to equal participation and suggest a conceptual map that allows overcoming these barriers to make sure that the benefits of the possible changes are accessible to every student.

The remaining parts of this study are organized in the following way. Section 2 gives a detailed theoretical background of CSR and ECAs, exploring the underlying theoretical bases of the concepts that include Stakeholder Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Student Development Theory that form the basis to assimilate the initiatives in the HEIs. Section 3 is a comprehensive literature review, critiquing the current corpus of empirical research on CSR, ECAs, and employability, and specifically on how these have been integrated. Section 4 presents the research methodology, which describes data-collection procedures and the methods of analysis. Section 5 contains the findings, and the discussion is subtle and focused on how the findings contribute to the knowledge on the nexus between CSR, ECAs, and employability. Lastly, Section 6 provides closing statements providing a recap on the core knowledge and giving practical advice to HEIs to better deploy CSR and ECAs to enhance graduate employability and promote social responsibility.

2. Theoretical Understanding of CSR and ECAs in Higher Education

In order to have a complete understanding of how CSR and ECAs affect graduate employability, one needs to base the research in theoretical frameworks. These theories do not only explain the process that CSR and ECAs lead to personal, professional and ethical growth of students but also explains why such activities are essential to the development of the competencies that are required by modern labour markets. Of particular relevance to the functioning of such initiatives in HEIs are three theories, namely, the Stakeholder Theory, the Human Capital Theory, and the Student Development Theory.

The Stakeholder Theory offers a theoretical framework through which one can examine the connections between HEIs, and various constituencies served by the latter, such as students, employers, faculty, and the community, in general. Freeman (2010) has highlighted that organisations are not responsible only to the shareholders but to a wide range of stakeholders and this fact is particularly relevant to HEIs. In the fibre of CSR initiatives, universities need to adjust to the needs of internal stakeholders, including the students and the faculties, and the external stakeholders, including employers and the local communities. The social entrepreneurship, volunteer programmes and sustainability projects are CSR activities that meet the ethical expectations of the stakeholders by directly benefiting society. As a result, they increase the employability of students because they can afford to undertake socially responsible activities, develop ethical consciousness, and serve their communities. Furthermore, engaging in CSR will help students to have a more subtle insight into the social consequences of their professional activities. Such an inclusive view of CSR in higher education serves not only personal development but also provides the students with the combination of skills that is highly demanded in the labour market, such as leadership, ethics, decision-making, and community engagement (Rahman et al., 2019; Vázquez Burguete et al., 2013).

Moreover, CSR programs in HEIs build the institutional engagement between the institutions and the immediate societies that provide connections that will benefit students in their job search activities. Such networks serve as a source of career as well as a tool for building social

capital which is known to be crucial in career progression in the current globalised labour market. Stakeholder Theory states that the resultant opportunities offered by CSR in terms of creating valuable collaboration with external organisations allow HEIs to provide students with particular opportunities in internships, mentoring, and collective projects, which elevate their levels of employability (Green et al., 2019).

Human Capital Theory is another theory that can be used to understand how CSR and ECAs enhance employability. Becker (1964) was of the view that investments in education and skill learning increase the economic worth of a person, which directly applies to CSR and ECAs. CSR, as well as ECAs are investments in the individual and professional development of students. Engaging in CSR activities, including the organisation of community service projects or environmental sustainability initiatives, helps students gain leadership skills, project-management skills, and practical problem-solving skills. These experiences provide students with the means of succeeding in the workforce and especially in areas where social responsibility and ethical behaviour are valued (Swingler et al., 2022; Javed and Srivastava, 2024).

In addition, ECAs such as student clubs, volunteering, and sporting activities give students a platform to gain and develop soft skills that make them employable. That is because academic success is rooted in such skills as teamwork, time management, and communication, and is directly associated with performance in the workplace. According to the Human Capital theory, the more the students practice these activities, the more their investment in human capital, which increases their appeal to prospective employers. The investment in CSR and ECAs helps students to enhance their employability by acquiring transferable skills, which allows them to adjust to different job settings and work well in different work settings (Javed & Srivastava, 2024).

Notably, the cumulative impact of such activities on the professional development of the students is also a focus of the Human Capital Theory. Although each of the CSRs or ECA might seem small, they yield significant improvement in the qualification of the students over time. Participation in a wide range of CSR and ECA activities will prepare the students with a well-rounded skill base, which will make them well-skilled candidates capable of satisfying the requirements of the modern workforce. When included in the curricula of HEIs, these activities contribute to the consistent enhancement of human capital and make graduates more competitive in the labour market (Swingler et al., 2022; Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2023).

Student Development Theory prefigures the complete development of students as they pursue their academic path. Astin (2014) insisted that engagement in academic and non-academic activities plays a significant role in personal development, leadership skills and social accountability. This theory holds that participation in ECAs is critical in developing the non-cognitive skills that are increasingly appreciated in the workplace. As an example, working in student governance, organising events, or volunteering builds emotional intelligence, resilience, and the feeling of social responsibility, which are invaluable in the contemporary workplace (Berei, 2020; Suffrin, 2017). Student Development Theory, therefore, reiterates that the role of HEIs is not specifically based on academic learning but should also provide students a chance to enhance socially, ethically, and personally by involving them in extracurricular activities.

The fact that Student Development Theory places a lot of focus on the community and social interactions is also a strength of the theory since it highlights how personal development can be promoted through these factors. ECAs, including volunteering and leadership positions, allow students to build social networks and relations that are necessary in the realm of personal and professional achievements. Being able to provide students with the opportunities to work with different teams, overcome social barriers, and take leadership roles, ECAs help them to obtain the

competencies that are necessary to collaborate and solve problems in their professional activities. Moreover, such experiences encourage moral conscientiousness and civic participation, which are valued by the employer as the socially conscious and responsible graduates (Swingler et al., 2022).

Collectively, these three theoretical models, the Stakeholder Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Student Development Theory, allow understanding the role of CSR and ECAs in HEIs functioning to increase employability comprehensively (Costa, 2022). Incorporating CSR and ECAs in the academic and extracurricular life of students, HEIs create the possibilities of acquiring various vital skills required by both employers and society. CSR activities enhance the understanding of the students about the social effects of the things they do, and ECAs provide the situations to exercise and develop soft skills (Isac et al., 2023). Such an integration not only equips students to succeed in their professions but also to live in society as responsible, ethical persons.

Also, these theories emphasize the need to integrate CSR and ECAs into the official curriculum and policies of HEIs. Although CSR and ECAs are often assumed as peripheral activities, their inclusion in academic programmes makes it a necessity to access these good developmental opportunities equally. Service-learning programs that combine academic study with volunteer work, such as helping students gain academic and social responsibility at the same time, allow students to gain disciplinary knowledge and social responsibility (Coelho & Menezes, 2021). Through these integrative opportunities being offered, HEIs ensure that graduates are fully equipped for the workforce and are in a position to positively impact society and tackle global challenges. With the increasing demand for graduates possessing diverse skill sets, the HEIs have to redefine their organization and incorporate CSR and ECAs in their education model. The next part will analyse the literature on CSR and ECAs more carefully, paying attention to the application of the said initiatives to the HEIs and their influence on graduate employability.

3. Literature Review

The role played by CSR and ECAs in graduate employability has been gaining popularity as a subject of study in the field of higher education. CSR and ECAs are both identified as being vital in the personal growth of students and their career preparedness. Although research has been conducted on CSR and ECAs separately, the interaction of the two activities with employability is not well researched. Available literature highlights the relevance of ECAs in helping employees develop desirable employability skills like teamwork, leadership, communication and problem solving. Employers highly appreciate these skills and consider them to be important in determining the career success of students (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2024). Student organisations, sports, leadership training, and ECAs containing volunteering roles give students a chance to use their academic knowledge in their practice, thus helping them develop personally and be professionally prepared (Javed & Srivastava, 2024; Green et al., 2019).

Likewise, CSR activities in HEIs have long been known to have the potential of building the social responsibility and ethical awareness of the students. Sustainability projects and community activities, socially responsible research, etc., are examples of CSR activities that allow students to realize the overall effect of their activities on society (Rahman et al., 2019; Vázquez Burguete et al., 2013). Students involved in the CSR programs have the opportunity to deal with real-world problems, and they are exposed to experience in solving problems, acquiring skills in relation to making ethical decisions and being proactive (Dahan and Senol, 2012). Through CSR, the students have a feeling of being responsible not just to their immediate academic and professional ambitions, but also to their communities and places of work, and thus are ready to make positive contributions in their communities (Suffrin, 2017).

Nevertheless, although the positive outcomes of both CSR and ECAs are well researched, there is scant literature regarding the ability of integration of the two aspects to increase graduate employability. The combination of CSR and ECAs can bring students a more holistic learning experience. A good example of the integration of CSR and ECAs is service-learning programs: the combination of both academic classes and community service (Green et al., 2019). It is not only through this integration that they enable the students to acquire practical skills, but it also equips them with knowledge on the importance of social responsibility and ethical considerations at the workplace. Service-learning provides students with a good work experience in addition to their studies, and thus, they are equipped to handle the challenges in the workforce.

In addition, CSR and ECAs incorporated in HEIs can serve to overcome some of the current obstacles to student participation. Although the current body of literature has mostly described the advantages of these activities, it seldom examines disparities in access that current knowledge has, specifically with regard to students living in lower socioeconomic status. Research indicates that poor students are not able to engage in such activities because of financial constraints, cultural reasons, and institutional restrictions (Donnelly et al., 2019; Sin et al., 2016). The marginalised students have lower chances of being attracted to do any unpaid internships or volunteer experience, both of which are common parts of the CSR and ECA programs. Such disparity in access to opportunities does not simply impede their personal and professional growth but also removes their career opportunities upon graduation. Learners with less wealthy households might experience profound financial constraints that preclude them from engaging in unpaid internships, volunteer opportunities, and other programs that are essential in accruing the soft skills and working experience dubbed as priced by employers (Nghia, 2017; Mwita et al., 2023).

Although the obstacles of participation are great, the incorporation of CSR and ECAs into the formal curriculum may assist in closing these gaps. Some studies have recommended that CSR and ECA opportunities need to be integrated into the educational models of HEIs and made mandatory components of the curriculum instead of extracurricular activities (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023; Swingler et al., 2022). This would make sure that every student, irrespective of his or her background, is equally exposed to these quality experiences, and this will be a facilitator of social mobility and will increase the overall employability. Formal combination of CSR and ECAs would also make it assure that students can get the best out of these activities as they would be known as mandatory components of their education instead of the peripheral or voluntary activities. The barrier of time is one of the factors that would be solved by offering academic credit to those participating in such activities and making such activities more accessible to every student.

Besides improving the level of employability, CSR and ECAs also help students become responsible global citizens. Both programs contribute to increased ethical awareness and social responsibility, which employers are also after (Rahman et al., 2019). With the global workforce being more interconnected and socially mindful, employers seek candidates who are able to work around tricky social and ethical concerns and be productive members of society. HEIs that incorporate CSR and ECAs into their programs are more able to equip their young graduates to fulfil such changing employer requirements and also benefit the larger cause of social development (Swingler et al., 2022). Through CSR, students are able to gain insight into the issues that are prevalent in the world and how they can contribute to resolving these issues, such as poverty, environmental sustainability and human rights. Such practices teach the spirit of being a global citizen and a responsible citizen, and these values are highly appreciated by employers, especially those in the sustainability, social justice, and community-oriented industries.

Although the production of literature on CSR and ECAs in institutions of higher learning has increased tremendously, some gaps remain that are supposed to be filled. Further studies are also needed on the interaction of CSR and ECAs on employability, since such opportunities might not be available across cultures, economic, or institutional conditions. The perception and implementation of CSR and ECAs in various cultural and regional conditions will give further explanations of how effective they are in increasing employability among the diverse student groups (Nghia, 2017). Additional studies might also investigate the role of CSR and ECAs in long-term career success, following up graduates over a long period of time and analysing their career paths, job satisfaction, and professional growth in general.

Also, it is necessary to examine the particular way in which CSR and ECAs influence employability. Further research needs to be conducted that evaluates the quality and the type of CSR and ECA programs that exist in HEIs and how they directly influence the employability outcomes of students. It would be good to investigate how various CSR initiatives (environmental sustainability, community development, ethical business practices, etc.) can help the development of certain employability skills (Sin et al., 2016). Also, one of the areas of research might be the comparative effectiveness of various forms of ECAs, including the leadership positions in student organisations, volunteering in non-profit organisations, and engaging in competitive sport.

Moreover, it would be helpful to review how CSR and ECAs are implemented in academic programs, not necessarily through the traditional volunteering and extracurricular activities. In CSR and academic learning, service-learning programmes and internships can provide students with a more organized avenue to acquire both professional and personal skills and equip them to enter the workforce in a manner that might not necessarily be provided through only purely academic or purely extracurricular experience (Huda et al., 2018). These initiatives ensure that the students have a holistic education and also provide them with the skills and experiences they require to compete in the fast-paced labour market.

Implementation of CSR and ECAs into the educational system not only makes students more employable but also leads to the development of the society (Setó-Pamies & Papaoikonomou, 2016). HEIs hope to realise socially responsible, ethical, and community-based graduates: hence, they have a key role in ensuring a skilled, but also socially conscious workforce. HEIs that accommodate CSR and ECAs into their curricular programs are helping to produce a more socially minded workforce, which is very crucial in solving the complex issues that the contemporary global society is grappling with. The following part will further discuss the methodology employed in this research, which will fill the gaps and provide the global perspective of the role played by CSR and ECAs towards graduate employability.

4. Methodology

The study uses a conceptual framework to analyse how the combination of CSR and ECAs in HEIs can inevitably make them more employable at graduation. Considering that there is a paucity of literature on the focus of this consolidated method, the methodology has been adopted through the review of the literature in order to develop an integrated picture of the interdependence of CSR, ECAs, and the employability outcomes. The study is an effort to synthesize the theoretical framework and existing research evidence, and its purpose is to describe a conceptual framework that would bring together the positive effects of CSR and ECAs on students (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023; Rahman et al., 2019).

The methodology follows a number of important steps. A critical analysis of the current literature on CSR and ECAs in higher education is made first to pinpoint relevant themes and

empirical research. It would mean considering the research that will evaluate the personal effects of CSR and ECAs on the development of skills and employability in students, and research that would investigate their synthesis. Second, the study utilises the related theories, namely Stakeholder Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Student Development Theory, to frame the discussion of CSR and ECAs. These theories explain the effects of these initiatives on professional and personal growth of students as well as the role they play in employability in the overall sense of higher education (Freeman, 2010; Becker, 1964; Astin, 2014). Third, inspired by the results acquired in the literature and theoretical framework, a conceptual model is offered explaining how the combination of CSR and ECAs can facilitate the increased employability of graduates and social responsibility.

Another important aspect of this approach revolves around the establishment of obstacles to participation, especially among student participants with marginalised backgrounds. The study explores the barriers impeding the complete utilization of CSR and ECA opportunities (financial resources, cultural, and institutional) in the modern situation in the area of higher education. These barriers are suggested to be overcome through strategies that can help the HEIs (Donnelly et al., 2019; Sin et al., 2016). The study also argues that an increase in the availability of CSR and ECA programmes to all students, regardless of their backgrounds, can increase equity in higher education and enhance overall outcomes in employability (Mwita et al., 2023).

This study does not imply the gathering of primary empirical data; it is based on the theoretical examination of studies, reports, and academic articles that are already in existence. The study attempts to fill the literature gaps by integrating various views on CSR and ECAs, thus providing a comprehensive perspective on how the two activities may be merged to improve graduate employability. A wide range of studies on different aspects of CSR and ECAs, such as their influence on the formation of skills, employability, and social responsibility, were included in the review process (Swingler et al., 2022; Javed and Srivastava, 2024).

The approach also dwells on a multi-stakeholder approach, that is, students, institutions, and employers, to develop a holistic view of the beneficial role of CSR and ECA programs in enhancing employability and the opportunities to address obstacles to access (Green et al., 2019). There are practical implications to HEIs, and recommendations as to how to integrate the CSR and ECAs into the curriculum and institutional policy are given. These are recommended based on literature and theoretical review, and they provide guidelines to universities that want to improve their employability performance and, at the same time, improve their social responsibility.

In addition, the study examines the role of employers in supporting CSR and ECA programs. An in-depth discussion of available literature, including different aspects of CSR and ECAs, i.e., their role in skill development, employability, and civic responsibility, was conducted (Swingler et al., 2022; Javed and Srivastava, 2024).

The methodological approach lays a lot of stress on a multi-stakeholder approach, which involves the students, institutions, and employers. This opinion is helpful to have a holistic approach to comprehending the beneficial role played by CSR and ECA programs in enhancing the employability and reducing access barriers (Green et al., 2019). Real-world implications of HEI are stated, and clear recommendations about the ways of CSR and ECAs incorporation in the curricula and institutional policies are provided.

Employers tend to value graduates who have a wide range of soft skills and behaviors that can be deemed socially responsible. One of the most central roles is taken by the employers who can partner with universities and sponsor CSR and ECA programs to equip students with the skills needed in the workplace (Dahan & Senol, 2012). Also, the employers can affect the curriculum

development by providing internship programs, mentorship and community engagement programs in accordance with the premises of CSR and ECA (Rahman et al., 2019).

The results of this article add to the growing volume of research on CSR, ECAs, and employability to provide additional information on the overall impact of such activities. The study is specifically applicable to HEIs aiming at improving their employability initiatives, as well as, making CSR and ECA opportunities more affordable, and hence, increasing social responsibility and equity in higher learning institutions (Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2023).

5. Findings and Discussion

This part is the summary of the literature review and analysis of the issues relating to corporate social responsibility and extracurricular activities in higher education, in particular, their subsequent impact on graduate employability. The conceptual frameworks of stakeholder theory, human capital theory, and the student development theory are used to present the findings. Using the case of CSRs and ECAs in HEIs, the study determines the role of such institutions in helping students to gain employability skills and their drawbacks that hinder the equal accessibility of the programs to students of all categories.

According to existing literature, CSR and ECAs both play a major role in improving the employability of graduates by equipping them with both hard and soft skills. Involvement in CSR also provides students with real-life experiences that help them to sharpen their understanding of social responsibility, ethical decision-making, and community engagement (Rahman et al., 2019; Vázquez Burguete et al., 2013). Such experiences allow the students to master skills that would make them successful in the modern labour markets, such as project management, working in a team, and leadership (Dahan and Senol, 2012). Particularly, the CSR activities that imply cooperation with third-party organizations offer students a chance to build professional connections and to polish their perception of the processes in the work-related environments, which contribute to improving career opportunities (Green et al., 2019).

On the same note, ECAs are essential to train on employability skills, allowing the students to afford to engage in activities to develop themselves and have chances to become leaders and communicators (Javed & Srivastava, 2024; Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023). The student can gain the necessary soft skills such as teamwork, time management and interpersonal dialogue, which are valued in the workplace, through participation in student groups, sporting and volunteer activities. These abilities are essential in an overly competitive workforce in which employers are turning more and more to graduates who can function within challenging social and professional settings (Swingler et al., 2022). The insertion of CSR in ECAs such as service-learning programmes, which integrate community service and academic coursework, further improves the formation of employability and social responsibility, which makes graduates more appealing to future employers (Green et al., 2019).

Although these advantages of CSR and ECAs are clear in regard to employability, the literature has also found numerous obstacles that limit access to these opportunities on a fair basis. Financial limitation is a huge limitation, mostly for students in lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Such students are unable to afford unpaid internships, volunteer programs and CSR, which are frequently required elements in both CSR and ECA programs (Donnelly et al., 2019). Cultural influences and institutional restraints can also inhibit participation in such a way through students who feel peripheralized by events that are incompatible with their values or students who are poorly represented in the student body. They lead to differences in the acquisition of skills and

jobs thus increasing the social stratification and hindrance of the ability of CSR and ECAs to foster broad-based employability (Sin et al., 2016).

The literature states that these barriers can be reduced by offering equal opportunities to the CSR and ECA opportunities in HEIs. The first of the solutions recommended is that institutions provide financial aid to students who want to participate in the unpaid internship or other forms of volunteer work, with the help of scholarships, stipends, or work-study programs that can protect students against financial pressures (Donnelly et al., 2019). This can also be enhanced by providing flexible schedules in which students who have time constraints are allowed to learn online because of job or family matters. The spread of CSR and ECA to students of all sorts will enable the HEIs to empower more people, regardless of their demographic information, with the skills they need to succeed in the labour market (Nghia, 2017).

The second strategy that can be considered to achieve the goals of breaking the barriers of access is to systematically incorporate CSR and ECAs into the formal curriculum. Previous studies emphasise the need to incorporate CSR and ECA opportunities in the academic programmes of HEIs in order to accept them as the inseparable parts of the student education instead of the additional options (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023; Swingler et al., 2022). HEIs may also facilitate the interaction by offering academic credit for the completion of CSR and ECA programmes and by making sure that these exercises are both academic and professional deterrence. This will also ensure that CSR and ECA will be open to all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or access to external resources.

Also, besides the expansion of the participation opportunities, HEIs can enhance the influence of CSR and ECAs by promoting cooperation with employers and community organisations. Partnerships with external stakeholders may also expose students to real-life learning experiences that are directly relevant to their career goals. As an example, students can use classroom knowledge in practice with the help of internships, mentorship programmes, and community-based work (Green et al., 2019). Such collaborations not only add value to the CSR and ECAs for the students, but they also generate a more efficient connection between tertiary education and the labour market, hence increasing the general employability rates of graduates.

Besides, the implementation of CSR and ECAs within the educational models of HEIs is capable of filling the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice. Through integrating the educational process in the classroom and engagement with CSR and ECAs, students have a higher chance of going to the workforce with the necessary competencies to succeed. These activities help in the creation of a broad-based skill set, including both technical skills and critical soft skills like communication, leadership, and teamwork. These competencies are invaluable in the competitive job market as employers are adopting the trend of hiring job applicants who can show sound knowledge of the subject and cooperation skills (Swingler et al., 2022).

Moreover, the contribution of the employers to CSR and ECA initiatives needs to be mentioned. Employers are crucial in determining the skills that can be given priority in the labour force and playing with HEIs can facilitate the achievement of the desired skills in students that are likely to lead them to achieve career success. The employers can encourage CSR and ECA programs by providing internships, mentorship programmes, and volunteer opportunities, which equip students with real experiences (Rahman et al., 2019). Also, companies can cooperate with HEIs to create CSR-oriented programmes that allow students to participate in the projects aimed at solving real-life issues, thus improving their academic and professional growth.

The results indicate that CSR and ECAs integration in higher education can significantly improve graduate employability, but such a possibility can be achieved only when participation

barriers are addressed. By ensuring that every student can access such opportunities, HEIs can enhance a more welcoming approach towards education that will equip students with preparation to work in the workforce, besides encouraging them to grow as responsible citizens. In doing so, HEIs have to play a proactive role in order to ensure that CSR and ECA programmes are available, participatory, and relevant to the requirements of the students and employers. This may be achieved by funding the same, making its programs flexible and strategic combinations that increase the worth of these experiences to students and society at large.

6. Conclusion

The conceptualisation of CSR and ECAs in HEIs introduces opportune prospects to further graduate employability as well as to develop social responsibility. CSR and ECAs will help in the development of students holistically, making them prepared to face the challenges of the modern work environment. As much as the two initiatives have been studied separately, this research will raise the need to incorporate them together so as to be able to provide students with a holistic education process. The point of CSR/ECAs convergence results in the development of both soft and hard skills that cannot be achieved without professional success. The major finding of this exploration is that CSR and ECAs assume complementary roles in improving the outcomes of employability. CSR programs foster social responsibility and ethics in decision-making, which are being pursued more often by employers (Rahman et al., 2019). The activities enable the students to learn in the real world, receive on-the-job instruction, and get the feeling of civic responsibility. On the contrary, ECAs also provide students with a chance to develop the interpersonal skills of leadership, teamwork, and communication that are extremely popular in modern collaborative environments (Javed and Srivastava, 2024; Swingler et al., 2022). CSR and ECAs also confer equal education levels that equip graduates with professional skills and active civic skills.

Although the advantages of CSR and ECAs as far as the employability is concerned are evident, the literature indicates that there are definite barriers to access that reduce the effect of the practice. Underprivileged students face severe impediments in taking part in CSR and ECA programmes because of financial and cultural and institutional barriers (Donnelly et al., 2019; Sin et al., 2016). The barriers are likely to make the students unable to enjoy such programmes to the fullest and thus spoil personal and professional development. To solve these issues, HEIs should make sure that opportunities for CSR and ECA are offered to all students regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds. This goal can be met with financial assistance such as scholarships, stipends, or any other restitution, especially with the schedules obviated by the students or distance learning, since most students spend a very short time on it, occasionally necessitating limited financial aid.

Inclusion of CSR and ECAs in the formal curriculum is a good approach to defeating access barriers. Making the process of CSR and ECA practices an obligatory aspect of the curriculum, HEIs will be able to ensure that every student receives equal access to such beneficial experiences (Aliu and Aigbavboa, 2023; Swingler et al., 2022). Academic credit for participation in CSR and ECA programmes would not only motivate students to engage in them but also help them easily incorporate them into the entire academic experience. The given approach will make sure that the students obtain not only academic knowledge but also practical skills, which will make them future staff and improve their employability.

Employers are also important in assisting with CSR and ECA initiatives. Employers are prioritising more graduates who possess a wide range of skills which encompass both soft skills, like communication skills, leadership skills, and skills in ethical decision-making, as well as the

technical skills. The role of employers in positively impacting the competence aspect development is to support the HEIs and approve CSR and ECA programmes. Another option they have is to make deals with universities where they provide interns, mentorships, and community-based projects so that the students can earn experience, and at the same time, give back to the community (Rahman et al., 2019). These partnerships cut across the academic theory and professional practice, and thus, increase the employability of the graduates.

HEIs must ensure they foster collaboration with other outside stakeholders, such as community organizations, to increase the effects of CSR and ECAs. Joint engagements have the potential to give students special access to community service and social entrepreneurship and sustainability projects, which meet academic and career goals (Green et al., 2019). These programs have the strength to bridge the disparity between college and workforce, such that students learn skills and experiences that are directly linked to the needs of the employer. Through offering students a chance to work on real projects, HEIs would be in a better position to equip students for the workforce, and in the process, promote the social good.

The fact that CSR and ECAs are integrated into the curricula of HEIs does not just increase employability but also leads to the development of socially responsible graduates. CSR programmes allow students to understand the overall consequences of their actions and foster ethical and socially responsible behaviour on both individual and professional levels. In a world that is gradually turning into a global village, and a business society has become highly social, employers are becoming more and more insistent on graduates capable of making their contributions to responsible and sustainable business practices. With the integration of CSR and ECAs into the educational framework, HEIs will be able to graduate students who are highly professional in their prospective careers, as well as devoted to making a constructive change to society (Swingler et al., 2022).

A significant impact of the current research is that it underlines the need of HEIs to reconsider the design of their CSR and ECA programmes. The conventional model, where these activities are considered as optional or peripheral activities, might limit the impact they have on the employability outcomes. By making these initiatives part of the official curriculum, the HEIs can ensure that every student has equal access to the benefits of CSR and ECAs regardless of their background and resources. The case also brings CSR and ECA operations in harmony with the larger aspirations of higher education, which encompass preparing students to live fruitful career paths, developing workforce preparedness, and social responsibility and engaged citizenship.

The interaction effects involving CSR and ECAs on employability need to be investigated in future studies to be more specific. There is a need to conduct empirical studies to determine the results of these initiatives on the career paths of students, job satisfaction, and their general professional success over time. Specifically, one of the studies might be on the effectiveness of various CSR and ECA programmes in developing certain skills that are critical in employability. Moreover, research on the impact of CSR and ECAs on students in diverse cultural backgrounds, in particular, their non-Western background, where access to such opportunities may vary due to institutional or socio-economic characteristics (Nghia, 2017).

In essence, higher education may gain significant prospects of improving graduate employability, as well as promoting social responsibility, after integrating CSR and ECAs. HEIs can make students ready to succeed in the quickly changing and globalized world by equipping them with technical skills and soft skills. However, in order to achieve maximum benefits of CSR and ECAs, HEIs need to deal with barriers to participation that hinder students with marginalised backgrounds from participating in these programs. Providing fair access to CSR and ECA

opportunities will help HEIs to help increase the creation of a more fair and socially responsible workforce. The given research is priceless to HEIs that aim to better their employability programmes, but it also suggests practical ways of incorporating CSR and ECAs into their curricula.

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