



# Exploring student perspectives on social responsibility in a business studies module in higher education

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, social responsibility (SR) has become an important aspect of teacher training programmes. One of the key objectives of Higher Education is promoting and developing social responsibility in the curriculum. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore teacher-student perspectives on social responsibility in a Business Studies education project at a South African university. Through a qualitative research approach, the study was conducted with forty second-year Business Studies Further Education and Training (FET) students, using focus group interviews to analyse the data thematically. The key findings highlight that students are willing to contribute to communities, irrespective of their prior exposure to community engagement. Their participation in the social responsibility project shaped their values, attitudes and professional identity. Furthermore, the project framed their teamwork and solidarity as part of the collective process. These findings provide valuable insights for students, higher education lecturers, and policymakers at HEIs. One of the key recommendations is that social responsibility should be embedded in the Business Study curriculum, FET phase courses at universities. The study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on university SR in teacher education by providing insights from a South African context, an area that remains underrepresented in the literature. It advances knowledge, illustrating how SR projects can shape students' professional identity formation and civic values in Business Studies education. It also provides a strategy for integrating SR into teacher education modules that aligns with the FET phase curriculum and national education priorities.

**Keywords:** Social Responsibility, Business Studies, Higher Education, Community Engagement

## INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world are expected, not only to produce knowledge, but also to respond to social and economic challenges through socially responsible practices. The concept of SR in higher education refers to the obligation of institutions and students to contribute meaningfully to the well-being of communities, while fostering ethical, civic-minded graduates prepared to address societal challenges.<sup>1</sup> Within the South African context, where education is viewed as a vehicle

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<sup>1</sup> Emese Beáta Berei, "The Social Responsibility among Higher Education Students," *Education Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2020): 1–12; Anica Hunjet, Goran Kozina, and Dijana Vukovic, "Social Responsibility within the Higher Education Framework," *Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings*, 2020.

for transformation, teacher education programmes are increasingly being called upon to integrate SR into their curriculum to prepare future teachers as agents of change. Started in the public sector, with the underlying roots of commitment, mutual benefit and community upliftment, the activities extend beyond academic instruction to foster values such as openness, sincerity, consistency, and responsibility for credibility.<sup>2</sup> Higher education institutions have always contributed to the social and cultural development of places; however, in recent years, they have been called upon not only to produce knowledge but also to apply it in ways that respond to social, economic, and environmental needs.<sup>3</sup> Although some scholars argue that SR serves as a transformational tool, others argue about its practical implementation, sustainability, and the degree to which it is integrated into the curriculum.<sup>4</sup> Within the context of business studies education, SR projects help students apply academic learning to real-world problems, fostering empathy, problem-solving, and teamwork through community engagement.<sup>5</sup> Initially focused on encouraging institutions to contribute positively to their workers and surrounding communities, it shifted to instill a sense of responsibility in students.<sup>6</sup> While SR has been well explored in the corporate and management literature, limited attention has been paid to how SR is conceptualized and experienced within teacher education, particularly in Business Studies programmes. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to how students themselves perceive these engagements and the extent to which such experiences influence their growth and views on their educational experience. Understanding these perspectives is crucial to aligning university curriculum with national expectations and to shaping civic-minded, ethically responsible future educators.

The purpose of the study is to explore teacher-students' perspectives on social responsibility within a Business Study education project at a South African university. It investigates how participation in a community-based project shaped students' knowledge, attitudes, personal growth, and views on integrating SR into the curriculum. The study contributes to scholarship by offering an evidence-based understanding of how SR can be pedagogically embedded in teacher programmes. It extends current debates on university perspectives within a developing-world context.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social responsibility in higher education

Social responsibility (SR) in higher education, which serves as a “third mission” of HEIs, contributes to the social, economic, and cultural development of communities and has been one of the core functions of a university, alongside teaching and research.<sup>7</sup> Starting in the corporate world, SR in HEIs extends beyond the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the business world. In the business world, SR was considered a contribution of good towards workers, their families, and the communities, which was explained by the pyramid model of Carroll, which assumed that philanthropic responsibilities encompassed the actions of corporations to society's expectations.<sup>8</sup> As for HEIs, which are key factors in the development of knowledge-based economies and cohesive societies,<sup>9</sup> SR plays an important role

<sup>2</sup> Mónika Rajcsányi-Molnár, “Social Responsibility and Community Engagement at a Hungarian Regional University,” *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 21, no. 1 (2021): 53.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Chatterton and John Goddard, “The Response of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Needs,” *European Journal of Education* 35, no. 4 (2000): 475–96.

<sup>4</sup> Marie, Weiss, Matthias Barth, and Henrik von Wehrden, “The Patterns of Curriculum Change Processes That Embed Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions,” *Sustainability Science* 16, no. 5 (2021): 1579–93.

<sup>5</sup> Zhanna Utemisova, “Formation of Students' Social Responsibility in the Process of Volunteer Activity,” *Endless Light in Science* 30, no. 1/2 (September 2024): 55–57; Olanrewaju Awoyemi, Fadeke Adeola Atobatele, and Chioma Angela Okonkwo, “Teaching Conflict Resolution and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in High Schools: Preparing Students for Socially Responsible Leadership,” *International Journal of Social Science Exceptional Research*, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Márcia Coelho and Isabel Menezes, “Universitas: How Do Students Perceive University Social Responsibility in Three European Higher Education Institutions?” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 23, no. 4(2022):767–82.

<sup>7</sup> Elspeth Jones et al., “Global Social Responsibility and the Internationalisation of Higher Education for Society,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 25, no. 4 (2021): 330–47.

<sup>8</sup> Archie Carroll, “The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: Toward the Moral Management of Organisational Stakeholders,” *Business Horizons* 34, no. 4 (1991): 39–48.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Farnell, Anete Veidemane, and Don Westerheijden, *Assessing the Feasibility of Developing a Framework for Community Engagement in European Higher Education* (Zagreb: Institute for the Development of Education, 2020).

in building human capital, and contributes to social, economic, cultural and environmental development, which is the foundation for SR.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, universities are a critical space, not only to shape employable graduates, but to prepare the students for future activities, and also for their lives as critical and engaged citizens.<sup>11</sup> As a global knowledge industry, universities require students to fully develop their own abilities, educating them to become critical participants in a democratic society that will foster equity and justice, enabling them to structure the social knowledge society.<sup>12</sup> Although the inclusion and social justice issues lack the involvement of all stakeholders in some cases,<sup>13</sup> it was highlighted that greater participation can be the driving force to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set out in Agenda 2030.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this responsibility is embedded in the core functions of universities, teaching, research, and community engagement, positioning them as agents of social transformation.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, universities have the duty to model sustainable practices, promote ethical research, and partner with communities for shared development.<sup>16</sup> Through community engagement activities, universities act as mediators between academic knowledge and real-world knowledge, promoting sustainable development competencies through the integration of, for example, service learning projects.<sup>17</sup> Student perceptions and participation play a central role in the realization of SR in higher education because their participation directly influences the impact of SR initiatives, and should be given proper weightage in the assessment of their performance as well.<sup>18</sup> Engagement in service learning projects and community-based coursework has been linked to multiple positive outcomes in students, such as increased self-efficacy, leadership, empathy, and students' prosocial behavior can be nurtured once they are appropriately supported.<sup>19</sup> For a business studies module, such a teaching approach stands out to connect theory and practice by allowing students both to participate in a service that meets the community, and to reflect on their experiences.<sup>20</sup>

### Social Responsibility in the Business Study Curriculum

The South African school curriculum is divided into the foundation phase, intermediate phase, senior phase and the further education and training phase (FET). Each of the phases represents learners of different age groups, for example, the FET phase represents learners who are in their three final years of school (grades 10, 11, and 12). In the South African Business Studies curriculum document, the curriculum and policy statement (CAPS), the concept of SR is spread over the FET phase (DBE, 2011).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Jones et al., "Global Social Responsibility and the Internationalisation of Higher Education for Society."

<sup>11</sup> Daniel T. L. Shek, Angelina W. K. Yuen-Tsang, and Eddie C. W. Ng, "University Social Responsibility (USR): Insight from the Historical Roots to the Contemporary Challenges," *University Social Responsibility and Quality of Life: A Global Survey of Concepts and Experiences*, 2017, 25–36.

<sup>12</sup> Coelho and Menezes, "Universitas: How Do Students Perceive University Social Responsibility in Three European Higher Education Institutions?"

<sup>13</sup> Letizia Lo Presti et al., "Inclusion and Social Justice in Sustainable Higher Education: An Integrated Perspective through the Lens of Public Engagement," *Journal of Management and Governance* 28, no. 3 (2024): 771–809.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, "EU Approach to Sustainable Development," 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-holistic-approach-sustainable-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-holistic-approach-sustainable-development_en).

<sup>15</sup> Il-haam Petersen and Glenda Kruss, "Universities as Change Agents in Resource-Poor Local Settings: An Empirically Grounded Typology of Engagement Models," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 167 (2021): 120693.

<sup>16</sup> Katrin Kohl et al., "A Whole-Institution Approach towards Sustainability: A Crucial Aspect of Higher Education's Individual and Collective Engagement with the SDGs and beyond," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 23, no. 2 (2022): 218–36.

<sup>17</sup> Denise Rodríguez-Zurita et al., "Sustainable Development through Service Learning and Community Engagement in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 26, no. 1 (2025): 158–201.

<sup>18</sup> Lidya Agustina, Meyliana Meyliana, and Hanny Hanny, "Constructing CSR Student Self-Consciousness through University Social Responsibility Implementation: Evidence in Indonesia," *Social Responsibility Journal* 19, no. 5 (2023): 885–905; Jandhyala B.G. Tilak, "Social Responsibility of Higher Education," *Social Change* 52, no. 4 (2022): 478–90.

<sup>19</sup> Raphael Gutzweiler, Simone Pfeiffer, and Tina In-Albon, "'I Can Succeed at This': Engagement in Service Learning in Schools Enhances University Students' Self-Efficacy," *Studies in Higher Education* 47, no. 12 (2022): 2539–52; Charlotte, Sze-Yeung Lai and Hui Patrick Chi-leung, "Service-Learning: Impacts of Learning Motivation and Learning Experience on Extended Social/Civic Engagement," *Higher Education Research & Development* 40, no. 2 (2021): 400–415.

<sup>20</sup> Katharina Resch and Ilse Schrittmesser, "Using the Service-Learning Approach to Bridge the Gap between Theory and Practice in Teacher Education," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 27, no. 10 (2023): 1118–32.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Basic Education, *National Curriculum and Policy Statement: Business Studies Grade10–12* (Pretoria: Government Printing, 2011).

According to CAPS, the content is spread over the three grades: In Grade 10, teachers teach learners to define social responsibility and corporate social responsibility and to contribute responsibly to the community in proximity to the school. In grade 11, teachers must make learners aware of the citizenship roles and responsibilities that business practitioners must perform within a business environment. In grade 12, learners need to contribute time and effort to advance the well-being of others in a business context and examine the implications of social responsibility for business and communities.

To align the educational institution's Business Studies curriculum with the fourth-year methodology modules, it is important to incorporate the CAPS themes in our modules. This is to expose students to SR projects concepts, content and practicals in the form of service learning, to prepare them for in-service practices. The CAPS curriculum expects teachers in South African schools to teach learners about socially responsible behavior by means of a practical component. If teachers are required to demonstrate socially responsible behavior by teaching a relevant practical component at the school level, they need to be appropriately trained. This must be achieved at the university level by exposing students during teacher training to a practical component of SR, as envisioned by this study.

### **Community engagement and curriculum integration**

The integration of an SR project is to move away from a theoretical-centered approach in the teaching and learning of business studies to a practical approach, which involves the community, because of the changing landscape of higher education due to globalization. Furthermore, the incorporation of SR into higher education has been shown to improve student satisfaction while simultaneously complementing teaching goals.<sup>22</sup> Building on this, Felton and Clayton identify several core characteristics that strengthen the educational and developmental impact of such initiatives.<sup>23</sup> These include the advancement of academic and civic learning goals alongside community purpose; the establishment of collaboration among students, faculty, communities, and institutions to achieve shared goals, along with structured reflection and assessment to ensure meaningful learning and tangible outcomes.

The basis of the Business Studies education curriculum at the university began with the university's recognition of its own SR commitment in the education process. Lecturers were challenged by society's increased expectations of how they sensitize their students. They can shape and influence the thinking of their students through how they teach SR.<sup>24</sup> This requires an examination of strategies for integrating social responsibility into educational curricula. According to Hanke and Stark, there is a three-dimensional integration strategy for SR, namely, universities' social responsiveness, economic responsibility, and public responsibility.<sup>25</sup> The study aims to HEI, with a particular emphasis on the social responsiveness of universities. This core strategy involves how academic institutions actively engage with the needs and challenges of their communities. Therefore, universities must respond to the identified needs of communities and come up with solutions to social issues in their surrounding communities.<sup>26</sup> To ensure its successful implementation, the social responsiveness strategy must be integrated into instructional approaches, which can be aligned with social responsibility in the education curriculum.

### **Impact of community engagement on student development**

The recent context indicates an acceleration of expectations placed on higher education to develop socially responsible citizens and to create graduates who will solve the complex problems of an increasingly complex world. Higher education has an obligation to develop socially responsible

<sup>22</sup> Abdul-Nasser El-Kassar et al., "Doing Well by Doing Good: Why Is Investing in University Social Responsibility a Good Business for Higher Education Institutions Cross Culturally?," *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management* 30, no. 1 (February 8, 2023): 142–65, <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCSM-12-2021-0233>.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Felton and Patti H. Clayton, "Service Learning," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 128 (2011): 75–84.

<sup>24</sup> Abrahão De Moraes, Viviane, Maria Vaquero-Diego, and Rosa Currás Móstoles, "University Social Responsibility: The Role of Teachers," *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge* 9, no. 1 (2024): 100464.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hanke and Stark Wolfgang, "Strategy Development Conceptual Framework on Corporate Social Responsibility," *Journal of Business Ethics* 85, no. 3 (2009): 507–16.

<sup>26</sup> Anouk Koekkoek, Maarten Van Ham, and Reinout Kleinhans, "Unraveling University– Community Engagement: A Literature Review," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 25, no. 1 (2021): 3.

citizens,<sup>27</sup> to enable them to resolve complex problems in a rapidly changing world. This was evident from the research of Chowdhury et al.,<sup>28</sup> which indicated that community partnerships offer strong development opportunities and maintain curricular flexibility to effectively integrate real-world learning experiences. Therefore, the benefits of participating in these activities will include developing empathy, cultural awareness, leadership skills, and commitment to social justice among participating students.<sup>29</sup> The engagement with communities will strengthen students' social consciousness, making them aware of inequalities, ethical dilemmas, and societal needs.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore teacher-students' perspectives on social responsibility in their business study module at a higher education institution. This design allows the researchers to investigate the phenomenon in its natural setting and is of a contemporary event in which the researchers are not attempting to manipulate the behavior of the students.<sup>30</sup> Adopting a qualitative approach enables researchers to analyze the students' perspectives on their lived experiences of integrating a social responsibility project. Based on Creswell's framework, a qualitative research approach is an iterative process of enquiry, through constant comparison and contrasting, whereby research makes sense of and interprets social phenomena.<sup>31</sup>

The selection of second-year students who have Business Management as a subject was used as a convenience sample. According to Kumar, convenience sampling is primarily guided by the convenience to the researcher, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, known contacts, ready approval to carry out the study, or being part of the group.<sup>32</sup> A convenience sample of forty (40) students was appropriate because the researcher has easy access to the students, as he is the Business Management lecturer for the second year students. Focus group discussions were used to collect data on opinions from the ten groups to gain collective views about the research topic, to improve data quality.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the SR project was conducted collaboratively, using focus groups to collect data in small groups mirrored this collaboration and allowed participants to construct meaning by building on the reflections of others. This method was particularly suitable for exploring shared attitudes, values and group dynamics. To ensure the precision and credibility of the findings, participants were invited to review and validate the results and establish the validity and reliability of the findings. The focus group transcripts were thematically analyzed, first becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, and then identifying and naming the themes from the responses of the participants. Permission was obtained from the institution's ethics committee before the data collection. Participants were provided with the study purpose, potential risks, and voluntary consent was obtained through informed consent.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following key themes (See Table 1) emerged from the data analysis of the students regarding their perceptions when working on a social responsibility project in their Business Studies education module.

<sup>27</sup> Juliet Millican and Tom Bourner, "Student-community Engagement and the Changing Role and Context of Higher Education," *Education+ Training* 53, no. 2/3 (2011): 89–99.

<sup>28</sup> Sudipta, Chowdhury and Ammar Alzarrad, "Advancing Community-Based Education: Strategies, Challenges, and Future Directions for Scaling Impact in Higher Education," *Trends in Higher Education* 4, no. 2 (2025): 21.

<sup>29</sup> Cristina Tripon, "Bridging Horizons: Exploring STEM Students' Perspectives on Service-Learning and Storytelling Activities for Community Engagement and Gender Equality," *Trends in Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (2024): 324–41; Jason Anthony Plummer et al., "Assessing the Link between Adolescents' Awareness of Inequality and Civic Engagement across Time and Racial/Ethnic Groups," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 51, no. 3 (2022): 428–42.

<sup>30</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2017), 282.

<sup>31</sup> J.W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Ranjit Kumar, "Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners," 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2015), 541.

**Table 1: Theme summary table**

Theme	Core Idea	Interpretation
Cultivate a willingness to contribute	Students express motivation to help others.	Students reflect values and moral dimensions of SR.
Prior exposure to community engagement	Students had a varied exposure to SR during school or university.	Inconsistency in SR exposure before or during higher education.
Impact of SR on participants	Participation led to personal and professional transformation.	Aligns with transformative learning and identity development.
Group dynamics and collaborative learning	Group collaboration enhanced communication, respect, and shared problem-solving.	Echoes the role of collaborative learning and professional growth.

### Theme 1: Cultivating a willingness to contribute

To influence student development, they must actively engage in all relevant settings and collaborate with businesses and communities.<sup>34</sup> The willingness to help others should stem from a desire within an individual, which is one of the key factors in the definition of social responsibility, which is social duty or “just to do good” to others. Engagement in community initiatives could be seen as a valuable contributor to the well-being of the community and allows students to commit themselves to their future careers as teachers in the very same communities in which they are making a social contribution. Also, teachers, for example, are role models for their learners and should possess values such as caring, consideration for others, helpfulness and empathy. Understanding something for the growth and betterment of others is at the core of moral engagement with the world. The desire to help other people must come from within a person, as reflected in the answers of the student groups:

*Group 8: “Yes, we have a desire to help people. In our own circumstances, where we grew up, there is poverty. We can help by giving donations and food.”*

*Group 10: “We have a huge desire to help people. It is about the inner self to help people and not about money, and to let a child know that you can help him or her at any time.*

*Group 9: “Yes, we have a desire, and it does not have to be always money. It can be something in the house, such as clothes and things that you do not use in the house anymore. People appreciate that.”*

All the respondents in the groups expressed their desire to help their fellow citizens in whatever way, whether it is by contributing money, food or offering their services. The remark, “*where we grew up, there is poverty*”, indicated that some of the respondents have grown up in similar circumstances, hence their desire to help their fellow citizens. The students are willing to contribute to the community through the curriculum activities and express willingness. This is also linked to communalism, honesty, trust and a spirit of development, which align with a sense of Ubuntu.<sup>35</sup>

### Theme 2: Prior exposure to community engagement

The purpose of integrating the social responsibility project is also to prepare the Business studies education students for a particular teaching activity that they must teach as Business education teachers in South African schools, as stated in the CAPS documents, and to be aware of their prior knowledge of their engagements. Being exposed to prior community engagement activities will increase students’ confidence in engaging in social responsibility projects and making meaningful contributions to communities. The responses of the participants during their formal school career, however, were not consistent with their prior exposure:

<sup>34</sup> Syarifah Rahmawati et al., “Enhancing Student Competencies through Entrepreneurship and Cultural Collaboration: A Community Engagement Approach,” *Journal of Community Service and Empowerment* 4, no. 3 (2023): 652–63.

<sup>35</sup> Bukunmi Deborah Ajitoni, “Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony,” *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 7, no. 3 (2024).

Group 2: “There were community activities at school, but I did not take part. Only the council of learners took part, but no other learners.”

Group 3:” Yes, we were exposed in Life Orientation in grade 12.”

Group 7: “We were involved at school, but mainly in sport.”

From the comments of the respondents, it was clear that not all were fortunate to be exposed to community initiatives in a South African school. These interaction opportunities are lost when they are not engaged in communities, and therefore, they are not able to show responsibility for the well-being of others.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the responses of the participants about whether they were exposed to social responsibility in other modules at university were as follows:

Group 3: “Not one of us was involved in any similar projects in other courses.”

Group 4: “We were not involved in any similar projects in other courses.”

Group 10: “We were not really involved in any community activities at this university.”

These responses are considered formal exposure to community engagement and their social responsibility, and it was clear to the researchers that not all students were formally exposed to prior engagements at the university level. This is an indirect contrast to what Stewart indicated that universities have been urged to prepare graduates for successful professional and fulfilling lives as civically responsible citizens.<sup>37</sup>

However, some of the participants indicated that they are learning about social responsibility, beyond the formal school and university modules, but in everyday life situations. According to some of the respondents, they were exposed after school by helping family members and friends make contributions in the form of food parcels and clothing to disadvantaged communities. One respondent in a group expressed her view on how desperate the poverty situation was in certain communities by the following comment:

*“I helped my sister, who is a counsellor for the municipality, to distribute food parcels in the community and restore people’s dignity by placing cement bags during winter at disadvantaged people’s homes.”*

It was clear from the above statement of the respondent that, since disadvantaged communities face an uphill battle against poverty and other challenges, students can play a role in alleviating the challenges informally.

One of the purposes of Higher Education was to address the developmental needs of society, contribute to the socialization of enlightened, responsible and constructive critical citizens and to equip individuals to make the best use of the talents and opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment.<sup>38</sup> If students are not exposed to community initiatives in their courses, universities are not responding to the call from government and society to train more socially responsible students. According to Ruiz et al., HEIs contribute to the well-being of students, and are platforms to gain knowledge and experience, and need to promote exposure to the practice of good.<sup>39</sup> Providing community engagement opportunities

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Priestley et al., “Student Perceptions and Proposals for Promoting Wellbeing through Social Relationships at University,” *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 46, no. 9 (2022): 1243–56.

<sup>37</sup> Trae Stewart, “Honours Service-Learning and Civic Responsibility,” *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (2012): 51–60.

<sup>38</sup> Department of Education, *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation*. Government Gazette, No. 18207 (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> María Dolores Aledo-Ruiz, Eva Martínez-Caro, and José Manuel Santos-Jaén, “The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Students’ Emotional Appeal in the HEIs: The Mediating Effect of Reputation and Corporate Image,” *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 29, no. 3 (2022): 578–92.

to students will allow universities to influence the attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets of future teachers as decision-makers in their classrooms.<sup>40</sup>

### **Theme Three: Impact of social responsibility on participants**

Reciprocity is one of the key factors when students interact with communities. This means that students and community partners contribute different types of knowledge that work together to reinforce learning and improve performance by both parties.<sup>41</sup> In this social responsibility project, the Business Studies education students have generated new knowledge, values and attitudes in the context of this project. The interaction of the Business education students with the community organisations evoked the following responses from the groups:

*Group 6: "We learned about their needs and budgets, paintwork and the maintenance of buildings. We have learned to be more creative. It was not easy at first. We had to plan. Our perceptions about orphanage homes have changed."*

*Group 8: "We have learned a lot. We did not know it took such an effort to help other people. To keep such an organization on track takes a lot of effort, money and responsibility."*

Business studies education students have demonstrated the ability to generate new knowledge through application. Their reflections, such as "*we have learned to be more creative*" and "*we learned about their needs and budgets, paintwork and maintenance*", indicate a cognitive shift from theoretical understanding to practical application. This suggests that students can recognize the real-world relevance of classroom theory.

Several respondents acknowledged that they had not previously encountered issues such as poverty and inadequate living conditions, and for many, participation in the project served as an eye-opening experience. Furthermore, these issues affect students personally, and were evident in the following responses of the groups:

*Group 1: "It has changed our attitude towards the community in which we have carried out the social responsibility project. We did not know all the organisations in this community and did not know the farm community"*

*Group 5: "Let us look at people in a different way. Let us value people more. Appreciate the things that you have got"*

Being part of a community engagement project has changed the students on a personal level, which is also called "internalization" where the students adopt and internalize the attitudes and values associated with the project.<sup>42</sup> The students' attitudes changed, and they started to develop a sense of value for community circumstances, when they stated: "*... had no knowledge of farm community*". The students developed a sense of self-awareness and empathy through exposure to diverse communities, and this can lead to a possible shift in their role in the societies in which they live.

### **Theme four: Group dynamics and collaborative learning**

This theme explored the impact of the social responsibility project on the respondent groups in terms of the experience of working together. The Business Studies education students were divided into groups for the social responsibility project, and for the relevance and purpose of the study, it was appropriate to explore whether the interchanges and interactions within the groups and the group work contributed

<sup>40</sup> Aline Bento Ambrósio Avelar, Shelley Mitchell, and Luisa Sandes-Guimarães, "Integrating Sustainable Development Goals in Management Education: Impact on Student Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors," *The International Journal of Management Education* 23, no. 2 (2025): 101116.

<sup>41</sup> Majid Zamiri and Ali Esmaili, "Methods and Technologies for Supporting Knowledge Sharing within Learning Communities: A Systematic Literature Review," *Administrative Sciences* 14, no. 1 (2024): 17.

<sup>42</sup> Debbie, Haski-Leventhal, Mehrdokht Pournader, and Jennifer SA Leigh, "Responsible Management Education as Socialization: Business Students' Values, Attitudes and Intentions," *Journal of Business Ethics* 176, no. 1 (2022): 17–35.



to the success or failure of their project. From the respondents working as a group, their perspectives yield the following responses:

*Group 8: "If you have done such a project on your own, it may be at the end of the day traumatising you, because as a student, you are not used to the circumstances and poverty. As a student, I will never start such a project on my own. In our planning, we did not agree with each other, and we had conflicting ideas on what to do, how we are going to do it and for whom we are going to do it."*

*Group 9: "We have never done such a big project, and it was nice to work together and to communicate with each other. It has come down to what we have done and why we have done it for others. Group work was all right, and we felt that it was so easy to work together."*

*Group 10: "We have different personalities who think differently, but we came together, and although we had a lot of differences, we respect each other. "The negative aspect is about the time. We had to schedule meetings to accommodate everyone, and it was sometimes difficult."*

The interactions and interchanges were mostly positive, and a lot of trust and respect flowed from the group work. It also seems from the responses that working in a group, there was a sense of personalized development because, as indicated in one of the groups, "... at the end of the day traumatized you ...". Group unity and solidarity are important indications of the degree to which the group as a whole influences individual members. The greater the solidarity, the more positive members feel about the group and the greater the potential influence of the group.<sup>43</sup>

Feedback on the negative and positive aspects of working as a group is important, as students' reflection on their experiences is one of the core elements of implementing the social responsibility project into the Business Studies education curriculum. At universities, students must reflect on their practices and experiences to prepare them for their professional lives. According to Degife, reflective teaching suggests that experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but that experience coupled with reflection can be a powerful impetus for teacher development.<sup>44</sup> The students' critical reflection on the positive and negative aspects of working as a group led to changes in attitudes and values, which they believed could benefit them as prospective teachers. Although collaborative work can have many positive aspects, there were some challenges among the groups, such as the exchange of ideas: "In our planning, we did not agree with each other, and we had conflicting ideas on what to do", and "We had to schedule meetings to accommodate everyone". Studies emphasize that collaborative learning is an essential part of learning and that the challenges encountered in this process foster a mindset that values adaptability and flexibility.<sup>45</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study indicate the need for further research to understand how social responsibility projects can be incorporated into a Business Studies education module at HEIs. Aligning university modules with the CAPS curriculum ensures that students experience real-world application of social responsibility before entering schools as educators. Teacher training programmes should incorporate opportunities for future educators to plan, execute and reflect on socially responsible initiatives. This can increase students' identity formation, empathy and teamwork. SR projects should be intentionally designed as collaborative, reflective and community-oriented learning experiences. By providing staff training and integration with policy, embedding SR work in the curriculum, HEIs can cultivate socially

<sup>43</sup> Ying Wang et al., "Understanding the Influence of Emotional Solidarity, Positive Emotions and Loneliness on Senior Tourists' Willingness to Sojourn with Companions," *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 27, no. 3 (2022): 305–18.

<sup>44</sup> Degife Gudeta, "Professional Development through Reflective Practice: The Case of Addis Ababa Secondary School EFL in-Service Teachers," *Cogent Education* 9, no. 1 (2022): 2030076.

<sup>45</sup> Bassam Hussein, "Addressing Collaboration Challenges in Project-Based Learning: The Student's Perspective," *Education Sciences* 11, no. 8 (2021): 434.

responsible graduates equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities. Future research and policy development should continue to explore how such experiential pedagogies can be scaled and adapted across diverse higher education contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of Business Studies education students on their SR project. The findings of the study provide valuable insights into how students experience these kinds of projects offered to them as part of their curriculum. The students' active engagement in the community-engagement project not only strengthens their willingness to contribute but also fosters empathy, problem-solving, and increases a deeper sense of their civilized duty. However, their varied previous experience in community engagement highlights the need for curriculum-integrated opportunities that ensure that all students benefit from this transformative experience. The collective and reflective nature of group projects allowed participants to internalize social responsibility ideas and appreciate the relevance of change in their communities.

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