CSR INTEGRATION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

LỒNG GHÉP NỘI DUNG TRÁCH NHIỆM XÃ HỘI CỦA DOANH NGHIỆP VÀO TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP KHOA QUỐC TẾ - ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

Pham Thi Tuan Linh, Ha Trong Quynh

Thai Nguyen University; linhpt@tnu.edu.vn, quynhht@tnu.edu.vn

Tóm tắt - Trách nhiệm xã hội của doanh nghiệp (CSR) là chủ đề nóng của toàn cầu bởi doanh nghiệp hiện nay không chỉ cần chú trọng đến lợi nhuận mà còn phải quan tâm đến lợi ích của các bên liên quan chịu ảnh hưởng từ hoạt động của doanh nghiệp như chính phủ, người tiêu dùng, các nhóm lợi ích và cộng đồng. Trường đại học với vai trò giáo dục và đào tạo bởi thế cần lồng ghép nội dung CSR vào các hoạt động đào tạo để nâng cao nhận thức về CSR trong cộng đồng. Nghiên cứu về công tác lồng ghép CSR tại Khoa Quốc tế - Đại học Thái Nguyên (ISTNU) được thực hiện với mục tiêu đánh giá bước đầu công tác lồng ghép CSR tại ISTNU và chia sẻ kinh nghiệm lồng ghép CSR tại một trong những đơn vị đầu tiên tại Việt Nam thực hiện công tác này, trong đó dữ liệu định tính từ phương pháp phỏng vấn chuyên sâu bán cấu trúc và số liệu định lượng từ bảng câu hỏi được sử dụng để phân tích trường hợp ISTNU.

Từ khóa - trách nhiệm xã hội của doanh nghiệp (CSR), giáo dục đại học, lồng ghép nội dung trách nhiệm xã hội của doanh nghiệp, doanh nghiệp, sinh viên

Abstract - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is nowadays an internationally emerging topic because of the fact that enterprises not only need to focus on their profits but also to pay attention to the profit of all the people concerned such as governments, customers, interest groups and communities. Higher education (HE) as a result needs to integrate CSR into its system in terms of academic and non-academic activities to raise CSR awareness in the society. A research on CSR integration at International School of Thai Nguyen University (ISTNU) was conducted to initially evaluate CSR integration in HE and share experience from one of the first HE institution in Vietnam to carry out CSR integration. Particularly, qualitative data from semi-structured in-depth interviews and quantitative data from survey were mined to make an analysis of the case study of ISTNU CSR integration.

Key words - corporate social responsibility (CSR), higher education, csr integration, enterprise, student

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been becoming one of global central topics [2]. Nowadays, thousands enterprises around the world and international labors organizations, civil organizations have been joining in international conventions to develop the principles of human rights, labor, employment, anti-corruption [3]. Thanks to collective activities, the conventions connect enterprises in developing solutions for emerging global issues.

In Vietnam, CSR activities are limited because of many reasons among which limited awareness about CSR of enterprise themselves and of community. Vietnam enterprises have not been paying a considerable attention to CSR among overall corporate objectives and strategy, which leads to the fact that most of Vietnam enterprises have been just focusing on profits for themselves and shareholders and ignoring benefits and rights of other stakeholders such as environment, citizen, community, etc.

Therefore, integration of CSR in HE is among effective solutions to raise community CSR awareness. Around the world, universities have been developing activities to integrate CSR in teaching, discussing and researching for a long time. However, in Vietnam, the similar activities are still extremely limited. There is a modest number of Vietnam universities who have been developing a strategy for CSR integration into HE. Furthermore, among these universities there is a significant difference in CSR integration in terms of

volume, quantity and quality, and these kinds of CSR integration activities still have not received synchronous concern from universities, which leads to limited results of CSR integration in Vietnam universities.

2. Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate and share experience about integration of CSR in higher education at International School of Thai Nguyen University.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an international emerging trend and developed throughout the world [3]. Consumers today are not only paying their attention to product quality but the ways that they were produced. They need to know whether or not the products are environment - community friendly, humane, healthy [5].

Under society pressure, most of big companies in the world have been integrating CSR into their corporate activities seriously. A lot of CSR programs have been carried out such as: energy saving, carbon dioxide cutting, recycled material using, solar energy using, water cleansing, illiteracy reducing, school building, natural disaster victims helping, fund raising for anti-AIDS and other epidemic diseases in developing countries [3], etc.

Almost all of multi-national enterprises (MNEs) have constructed their own Code of Conduct which

demonstrates standards applied to their employees and partners throughout the world [2]. Benefits from CSR commitment have been recognized. Not only company image is improved in public eye and local citizen but also sales experience significant increase or investment formalities are easily completed. Especially, inside the enterprises, employees' satisfaction and loyalty to enterprises have remarkable improvement. Last but not least, energy saving program helps with reduction in operation costs.

Therefore, enterprises need to have awareness of influence from their business activities and have responsibility for society. Hence, it is said that the nature of business activities are not just for corporate benefits, but from the beginning, enterprises need to act as a corporate citizen with their appropriate obligations and rights in society.

3.2. CSR in Higher Education

The task of HE is to contribute to the social development and provide an increasing number of young people with opportunities to acquire quality first rate higher education and to become qualified, competitive professionals in the global context, whose competences meet the long term demands of the labor market. In the industrial society, the diploma or degree used to be a crucial precondition for permanent employment [1]. However, nowadays the formal scope of knowledge is losing its significance [4]. Analyzing and problem solving skills as well as the ability to apply the knowledge are a lot more important than the above. Consequently, higher educational establishments are expected to provide professionals with a lot more extensive knowledge and skills in the area of employment and human relations. Universities have to maintain the dialogue with the labor market. However, at the same time HE establishments have to be careful not to divert from their major mission - to ensure and provide the students with an opportunity to become an all-around educated professionals. Nowadays, companies and organizations require a professional manager with analyzing and ideas generating skills. Professional skills of a manager and entrepreneur extend well beyond the economic information about the company (financial accounting, analyses, control and forecasts) [7]. The manager has to be capable, of making human resources related decisions, where apart from the economic and legal aspects, psychological, pedagogical, esthetic and social aspects have to be considered. The new management theories are increasingly focusing on the imperative of the corporate social responsibility. Therefore higher educational establishments have to take on teaching corporate social responsibility to their students - prospective managers and entrepreneurs [6].

3.3. CSR Integration in Vietnam Higher Education

In recent years, CSR has been introduced to Vietnam HE through academic conferences, workshops, field trips, in which, faculty in universities have opportunities to learn from international and localCSR expertsabout CSR concepts, importance and CSR integration experience. There have been several leading universities starting to introduce CSR in their academic activities including Foreign Trade University, National Economics Universities, VNU University of Economics & Business, VNU International School, and University of Labor & Social Affairs. However, in these institutions, CSR is only introducedas extracurricular activities (workshops, field trips) or one topic in existing modules, which limits the comprehensive CSR integration in HE.

3.3. Introduction to International School of Thai Nguyen University

International School is an academic member of Thai Nguyen University which is located in Thai Nguyen City, a multi-disciplinary university of the northern mountainous area of Vietnam which is one of three religious university in Vietnam (together with Hue University and Da Nang University) which plays an inevitably important role in education and training of Vietnam in general and Northern Area of Vietnam in particular.

Through cooperation with foreign university, organizations, experts, ISTNU Board of Director understand the importance of CSR and CSR integration in higher education although it is still unpopular in universities in Vietnam in general and in mountainous areas like Thai Nguyen province in particular and step by step set up its own stragegy to bring CSR into ISTNU activities. Being a new academic member of Thai Nguyen University, ISTNU believes that CSR and CSR integration can construct one of its competitive advantages to consolidate its quality and reputation.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Methodological Approach

To obtain detailed information and in-depth understanding that might bring about relevant insights supporting to the aim and objectives of the research through observation and experience of insiders, aqualitative method is an appropriate methodology. In addition, quantitative data is mined to consolidate the findings and results of the research.

4.2. Data Collection

4.2.1. Primary Data

There are several types of primary data gathering supporting qualitative research among which the individual semistructured in-depth interview will serve as the main research data-gathering tool for this study. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the number of respondents in this study is relatively small with thirteen participation covering four categories which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Respondent Profile*

No.	Category	Respondent	Position
1		Prof. Mike Bull	Professor at Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), visiting scholar at ISTNU
2	**CSR Expert**	Nguyen Quang Huy (MBA)	Senior Lecturer of Faculty of Business Administration, Foreign Trade University
3		Dr. Phan Thi Thuy Tram	Expert in Ministry of Planning & Investment, President of Vietnam Social Enterprise Network
4	**Entrepreneur**	Mr. Nguyen Cong Huan	CEO Vietherb (Vietnam Social Enterprise)
5		Ms. Do Thuy Lan	CEO Morning Star Center (Vietnam Social Enterprise)
6	**ISTNU Leader & Faculty**	Assoc. Prof. Hoang Van Phu	Vice Dean, Member of Vietnam Social Enterprise Scholar Network
7		Nguyen Tu Anh (MBA)	Vice Director, Faculty of Business & Management
8		Le Duc Anh	Undergraduate student of International Business program
9		Vu Thi Minh Ngoc	Undergraduate student of Business Administration program
10	**ISTNU Student**	Dinh Thi My Hanh	Undergraduate student of Accounting & Finance program
11		Nong Thi Chieu	Undergraduate student of Business Administration program
12		Nguyen Thi Bich Hue	Undergraduate student of International Business program
13		Le Thi Hai Yen	Undergraduate student of International Business program

Source: Designed by author (2016)

The structure of interview questions is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *The structure of interview questions*

Type of question		Details
Identification question		Identification of respondents (Name, Background, Position)
Category question	CSR Expert	1.How is CSR integration in higher education today?
		2.Do you think CSR integration can be effectively implemented in Vietnam and ISTNU?
	Entrepreneur	1.Do you think CSR is important with enterprises? Why?
		2.How entrepreneurs can collaborate with universities in CSR integration implementation?
	ISTNU Leader	1.How can CSR integration implemented at ISTNU?
		2.What are advantages and disadvantages of CSR integration implementation at ISTNU?
	ISTNU Student	1.Do you think CSR integration in higher education is important?
		2.Describe CSR integration activities you know or have joined at ISTNU
Conclusion& Recommendation		Offer your conclusions and recommendation for CSR integration at ISTNU

Source: Designed by author (2016)

4.2.2. Secondary Data

In this research, quantitative and qualitative data taken from online quality assurance system about Responsible Business (in which CSR is the central topic) was employed to consolidate research results.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. CSR Integration in Higher Education in Vietnam

CSR experts provided overview of CSR integration in Vietnam HE, which demonstrated that not many universities in Vietnam have introduced CSR in their academic activities. As interview results, in Foreign Trade University, CSR is introduced as a topic in module Corporate Culture, Business & Professional Ethics,which

covers around 10% of each entire module. Respondents emphasized importance of CSR integration in HE as an official subject so that CSR can be more comprehensively introduced and studied. However, respondents demonstrated that the existing strict and inflexible policies and regulations in universities create barriers for effective CSR integration in HE.

5.2. Strategy of CRS Integration in Higher Education

Through the interviews, CSR experts and entrepreneur emphasized the importance of CSR and believe that CSR should absolutely be brought into universities. A CSR expert stated that CSR have been integrated into most of developed countries in the world and it must be step by step brought into Vietnam higher education to catch up with this

trend. Other CSR respondent said "There have been several universities in Vietnam have put CSR contents in their existing modules to introduce about CSR fundamentals, but it would be more effective and absolute if CSR can be constructed as an entire module".

CSR expert from Vietnam Social Enterprise Networkemphasize important role of cooperation between universities and entrepreneurs in CSR integration, which will provide comprehensive view of CSR for students with practical experience beside lectures and other academic activities.

Interviewees were excited that CSR have been integrated at ISTNU as an entire module and believe that the collaboration between ISTNU and CSR experts and entrepreneurs can make a successful integration of CSR.

Entrepreneurs stated that CSR today has played an increasingly important role in enterprises. CSR is an obligation ofenterprises, yet it can become one of competitive advantages if enterprises know how to

fulfill and claim its social responsibilities. Therefore, students need to know about CSR and learn how to manage with CSR in today competitive environment. As practitioners, entrepreneurs can collaborate with universities in CSR integration by participating in CSR workshops, discussing CSR curriculum development, granting funds for CSR student activities, providing venue and materials for CSR field study, joining CSR joint research, etc.

5.3. Implementation of CSR Integration at ISTNU

5.3.1. Advantages and Disadvantages of CSR Integration at ISTNU

ISTNU leaders stated "ISNTU is a new academic member of Thai Nguyen University and we need to find our own competitive advantages to position our name among other institutions and CSR integration is one of these". The respondents also mentioned advantages and disadvantages during implementing CSR integration at ISTNU which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages of CSR integration at ISTNU

Advantages	Disadvantages
▪ ISTNU is the CSR integration pioneer in Thai Nguyen University ▪ ISTNU have strong cooperation with British Council through signing CSR projects ▪ ISNTU is flexible in its policies	▪ ISTNU is new academic member of TNU with many difficulties in terms of experience and resources ▪ CSR awareness of students and local society is quite low

Source: Summarized by author from interview results (2016)

As interview result, ISTNU is the first in Thai Nguyen University who has a module designed for CSR in it undergraduate programs so that ISTNU can exploit its pioneer advantage. In fact, Assoc. Prof. Hoang Van Phu, Vice Dean of ISTNU is a member of Vietnam Social Enterprise Scholar Network in universities in the North of Vietnam who has access to a lot of CSR conferences, CSR documents and CSR experts so that ISTNU has opportunities to develop its CSR integration. Besides, ISTNU has strong cooperation with BC who has mission of developing CSR awareness and CSR cooperation between UK and other countries. Through its partnership, ISTNU and BC have signed and implemented projects in CSR integration in which BC supports ISTNU in connecting ISTNU and CSR experts, financing CSR integration in ISTNU, give opportunities for ISTNU faculty and students to attend CSR related conferences and programs. The other advantage of CSR integration at ISTNU is that ISTNU is flexible in its policies, which enables the school to easily and quickly implement its CSR integration strategy.

One of the biggest disadvantages of ISTNU in CSR integration is that ISTNU is a new born academic member of Thai Nguyen University with many difficulties. In fact, the school is a 5-year-old HE institution with limited resources and experience, which forces its Board of Director, staff and faculty to try very hard to overcome its obstacles. Other tough challenge of ISTNU CSR integration is that CSR awareness of students and local society is still quite low, which can cause the fact that CSR integration at ISTNU is underestimated. Because of low

awareness of CSR importance in local enterprises, students and communities, ISTNU needs to build its creative plans to step by step improve CSR awareness in local society in addition to institutional activities, among which voluntary works in local areas, CSR research partnership with enterprises are recognized as effective.

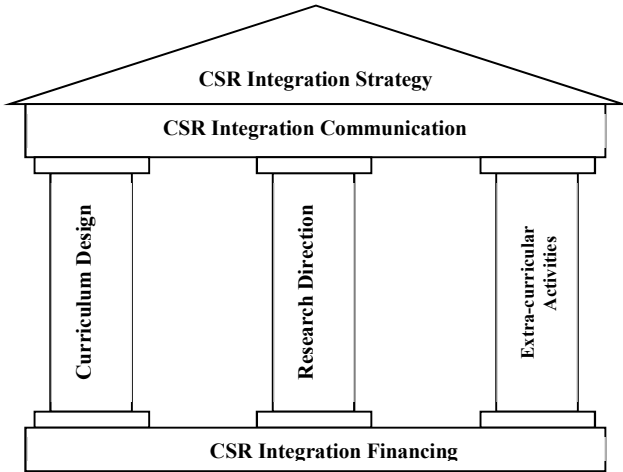#### 5.3.2. CSR Integration Model at ISTNU

Figure 1. CSR Integration Model at ISTNU

Source: Designed by author from interview results (2016)

ISTNU has built its CSR integration model focusing on CSR Integration Communication throughout its system with three pillars of Curriculum Design (construct module Responsible Business), Research Direction (encourage research CSR) and Extracurricular Activities (voluntary

activities, CSR seminars & conferences, other CSR events, etc.). ISTNU is active to participate in projects with CSR encouraging organizations in Vietnam and foreign countries to get financial support for CSR integration. CSR integration model at ISTNU is shown in Figure 1.

Pillar 1. Curriculum Design - Module Responsible Business

Being a 5-year-old institution, ISTNU has started its CSR integration since 2013 in collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) under a project funded by British Council (BC), in which BC connected ISTNU with CSR experts from MMU who will provide CSR materials and training for ISTNU faculty as model of Train of Trainer (TOT) through curriculum developing, lecture designing, workshop organizing and faculty exchanging. The module transferred from MMU to ISTNU is named Responsible Business (as the original module in MMU). The module has been taught since academic year 2014-2015 for 267 undergraduate students majoring in International Business, Business Administration and Accounting & Finance in 4 credits (equivalent to 60 face-to-face hours), covering topics such as Sustainability, Supply Chain Responsibility, Stakeholder Engagement, Cause and Social Marketing, Social Responsible Investing, Transparency, Human Rights, CSR Reporting and Social Enterprise.

To evaluate student response to module Responsible Business, the online survey was conducted by Quality Assurance Department at the end of each semester. After 2 academic years (4 semesters) since Responsible Business was first taught at ISTNU in 2014, 263 among 267 students who studied Responsible Business have been surveyed. The survey consists of questions about Responsible Business module including importance, contents, materials and teachers and gives space for student comments and recommendations.

Through ISTNU online quality assurance system, secondary data was mined to make an evaluation of ISTNU students on CSR integration which is shown in Figure 2.
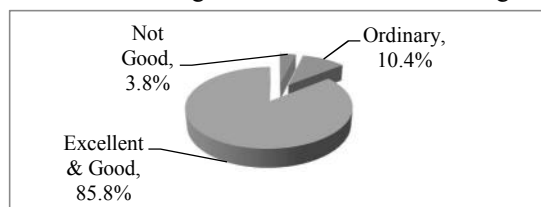

Figure 2. *Student evaluation on Responsible Business module*
Source: ISTNU Online Quality Assurance System (2016)

The survey from ISTNU online quality assurance system stated that 85.8% students voted Responsible Business as Excellent & Good, 10.4% voted as Ordinary and 3.8% voted as Not Good. The survey and interviews with ISTNU students also bring positive results of CSR integration. "I was extremely excited with CSR workshops and seminars with CSR experts andentrepreneurs, which brought me practical knowledge about CSR and CSR activities" – one respondent said. Other students stated "I have participated in CSR research and I feel grateful to ISTNU for giving me chances to

understand CSR in both theory and practice". One comment said that ISTNU needs to invite more foreign experts on CSR to deliver lecture and seminars to enhance quality of Responsible Business module.

Pillar 2: Research Direction

As interview results, for effective CSR communication in HE, research direction in CSR is emphasized as one of three important pillars. At ISTNU, Board of Director give encouragement and support for CSR-related research as one of the most focused research direction. Since CSR was first introduced, nearly 50% of total research volume of ISTNU students and faculty at ISTNU was conducted around CSR. The research focuses on CSR awareness in enterprises, students and community; CSR conduct in enterprises of healthcare, cosmetics and textile & garment; CSR in HE. Especially, ISTNU collaborates with enterprises to support students during their CSR reseach conduct.

Pillar 3: Extra-curricular Activities

Beside CSR teaching and research, ISTNU pays great attention to constructing CSR-related extra-curricular activities. ISTNU organizes talkshows, workshops about CSR with active participation of CSR experts and enterpreneurs. All the CSR events are supported and promoted by Youth Union, Student Union for effective communication with students to raise their awareness about CSR. Especially, in 2015, ISTNU collaborated with VSEN to become the first and only institution in Thai Nguyen who distributes Ngay Nay newspaper (the first free newspaper in Vietnam) to students, labor in Thai Nguyen province as part of Free Newspaper Project of VSEN. According to respondents in student category, through experience gained from the project, ISTNU students proposed an idea of establishing ISTNU Info Center, a center run by ISTNU Student Union to distribute free newspaper, books, magazines and provide free consultancy by professional and experts for students in Thai Nguyen province in terms of study, research, job orientation, future career, etc. The idea was promoted for Creative Idea Contest organized by Thai Nguyen University (TNU) and gained 3rd Prize for its creativeness and feasibility. These extra-curricular activities helps with more effective CSR communication at ISTNU in particular and TNU in general.

6. Conclusion

Analyzing case study of ISNU, the research gives a practice of CSR integration that have been gaining beginning success and promises further achievement in the future. At ISTNU, CSR integration has been implemented throughout its system with an overall intensive strategy and tactics, focusing on both academic and non-academic activities such as designing curriculum, conductingCSR research and organizing extra-curriculum activities. Through interview results, it is said that CSR integration at ISTNU receive positive feedback and comments from CSR experts, Entrepreneurs, ISTNU leaders and faculty, ISTNU students and ISTNU needs to develop its CSR integration strategy to build up its competitive advantage among other institutions.

The limitation of the research is that it was conducted only at ISTNU at the early state of CSR integration so that in the future, further research should be done in a wider scope with more quantitative and qualitative data analysis to consolidate research findings in this study.

REFERENCE

[1] Alves, H., Maninardes E.W. and Raposo, M. (2010) 'A Relationship Approach to Higher Education Institution.

[2] Baron, D. (2007) 'Corporate social responsibility and social entrepreneurship', *Journal of economics and Management Strategy*, vol. 16, no. 3 pp. 683-717, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ j.1530-9134.2007.00154.x

[3] Bearle, A. and Means, G. (2002) the Modern Corporation and Private Property. 4. Print. New Brunsvick: Transaction Publishers, 2002.

[4] Chapleo, C. and Simms, C. (2010) 'Stakeholder analysis in higher education', Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, vol. 14, vo 1, pp. 12-20, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603100903458034

[5] Freeman, E. (2010) Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Mainardes, E.W., Alves, H. and Raposo, M. (2010) 'An Exploratory Research on the Stakeholders of a University', *Journal of Management and Strategy.* vol. 1, no. 1, http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/jms.v1n1p76

[7] Michael, S.O. (2004) 'In search of universal principles of higher education management and applicability to the Moldavian higher education system'. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 118–137. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513540410522252