

Embedding Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Education: Fostering

Ethical Leaders for Economic and Environmental Resilience

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Abstract

In response to the growing complexities of environmental, economic, and social issues, business education as a program must adapt to address these interconnected challenges. Embedding the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility within business education curriculum offers a pathway to develop future leaders who balance financial success with environmental sustainability. The study was guided by two objectives, research questions, and hypotheses, and the population of the study comprises 200 final-year business education students from three Nigerian universities with accredited business programs. A descriptive survey method was employed; data were collected via a structured questionnaire validated by an expert in the department of test measurement and business education and administered through Google Forms. Reliability assessment yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Descriptive statistics addressed the research questions, while hypotheses were tested using simple regression analysis at a significance level of 5%. The results indicated that students who are exposed to CSR-oriented curricula exhibit significantly higher levels of ethical reasoning, environmental consciousness, and involvement in community engagement compared to their peers enrolled in conventional programs. The study concludes that integrating CSR into business education programs prepares graduates to succeed in competitive environments while upholding ethical standards and environmental stewardship. It recommends comprehensive curriculum reforms to integrate CSR throughout all business disciplines, enhanced faculty training

development focusing on sustainable education, and stronger academic industry partnerships to equip students with practical and experiential CSR learning opportunities.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Business Education, Environmental Resilience

Introduction

In today's world, characterized by environmental issues, widespread social inequalities, and volatile economic uncertainties, the importance of business education in fostering ethical leadership and promoting environmental sustainability is growing increasingly vital. Corporate Social Responsibility has transformed from being a charitable act into a strategic approach that integrates ethical values, sustainable practices, and accountability into the core fabric of an organization's culture. The rising importance of Corporate Social Responsibility as a core component of business operations highlights the need for improved strategies in addressing social and environmental influence. This transition calls for a reassessment of how to prepare education content that prepares future leaders to responsibly confront these evolving challenges. In developing economies, where resources are often limited and challenges are more pronounced, responsible leadership can

significantly influence community development, environmental conservation, and economic stability. A business education program is crucial in establishing a solid foundation for future managers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers by embedding these principles from the outset of their career journey. Integrating these principles within business education curricula is particularly important in emerging economies, where responsible leadership can significantly impact community growth, encourage sustainable environmental practices, and enhance economic stability (Ahmad, 2025). Zhao (2021) reveals that students educated through this framework are more likely to emphasize transparency, engage actively with stakeholders, and develop the long-term skills needed to tackle the challenges of a globalized and sustainability-oriented market. This implies that cultivating leaders who understand the essential link between

business success and societal well-being is critical.

Wahyuni et al. (2024) postulated that embedding Corporate Social Responsibility into business education is not only an academic necessity and societal imperative, essential for fostering leaders capable of driving economic strength and environmental sustainability. This approach ensures that graduates are not only equipped with practical and managerial abilities but also possess the moral compass that guides decisions, balancing financial success with the well-being of society and the natural world. In today's business environment, organizations face growing expectations to conduct their operations in ways that achieve profitable financial success while also upholding responsibility and environmental stewardship. This demand reflects a broader societal movement toward greater accountability and ethical conduct in business operations. Akinsola (2025) observed that the role of CSR in business education extends beyond impacting single organizations. Business education plays a pivotal role in preparing future leaders to thrive in an evolving business landscape. By embedding CSR into curricula, educational

institutions equip the students with both the essential technical skills needed for business management and the ethical understanding required to make responsible and thoughtful decisions.

The development of ethical leadership through business education ensures that graduates can integrate CSR principles into organizational strategies, making decisions that promote long-term societal well-being alongside economic growth. Business schools are uniquely positioned to influence the ethical compass of emerging leaders. By integrating CSR into curricula, case studies, and experiential learning, educational institutions can foster a generation of leaders who prioritize long-term societal well-being alongside financial success (Puchkov & Kholodov, 2025). Such integration ensures that graduates are not only adept in business acumen but also in navigating the complex ethical landscapes they will encounter in their careers. This approach fosters a generation of leaders who understand that sustainable business success depends on balancing profitability with social responsibility and environmental stewardship (Zhao, 2021).

Research conducted by Onisori et al. (2025) highlights the beneficial impact of ethical

leadership on corporate sustainability and financial performance, particularly when it aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This alignment significantly boosts the effectiveness of ethical leadership, leading to improved environmental, social, and governance (ESG) results. Ethical leaders who maintain strong standards of integrity and accountability are essential in steering corporate strategies that fulfil both economic and sustainability objectives, thereby enhancing the advantages of CSR initiatives in the current global business landscape (Elsayary, 2025). This implies that Ethical leadership, defined by moral responsibility, accountability, and integrity, stands as the cornerstone for driving effective Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts. Leaders who prioritize ethical decision-making play a vital role in shaping the culture of their organizations and cultivating robust relationships with stakeholders, ultimately enhancing business performance.

Recent studies underscore the significant impact of ethical leadership on promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that resonate with both company goals and community values. Research

indicates that ethical leaders contribute to an improved corporate reputation, boost employee morale, and increase productivity by nurturing an environment of trust, fairness, and integrity. This ethical framework is essential for supporting CSR efforts effectively (Onyekwelu et al. 2024). Obiako (2024) further revealed that ethical leadership built on trust and transparency forms the basis for cultivating competencies that enhance transparency within organizations, essential for the authentic advancement of corporate social responsibility. Leaders who exemplify integrity and fairness encourage their organizations to engage in CSR initiatives that stakeholders view as meaningful rather than symbolic gestures. Leaders who make decisions based on ethical principles ensure that CSR initiatives yield meaningful results, fostering both long-term sustainability and economic resilience. Akinsola (2025) further envisages that a genuine commitment to ethical leadership builds public trust, strengthens loyalty among customers and partners, and enhances the organization's competitive edge in the marketplace. This implies that ethical leadership goes beyond simple moral principles, becoming a strategic

necessity for companies seeking to integrate CSR into their core operations. Corporate Social Responsibility, ethical leadership, and environmental resilience are essential yet remain insufficiently integrated into business education programs. To prepare responsible leaders capable of balancing profit with societal and environmental concerns, curricula of business education must be expanded to include targeted CSR-focused courses and hands-on learning experiences that prepare future managers to meet today's complex global challenges with integrity and sustainability at the core (Gabelaia, 2025). In many Nigerian universities, curricula still prioritize financial management and administrative skills, often relegating ethics and sustainability to secondary importance.

This gap is exacerbated by several factors, including limited space within existing course structures, insufficient faculty expertise in CSR-related topics, and weak collaborations between universities and industry stakeholders. As a result, graduates often leave their programs without the necessary depth of ethical judgment, environmental awareness, and sense of social responsibility to tackle the complex economic and ecological challenges of

today's business landscape (Oladimeji et al., 2025). The identified gap underscores the significance of this research, which investigates the integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into business education as a means of cultivating ethical leaders. These leaders are expected to foster socio equity, economic stability, and champion environmental stewardship. This study is especially pertinent, as it seeks to bridge the divide between traditional business training and the increasing ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities that modern enterprises encounter.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing attention to global sustainable business practices, many companies continue to prioritize profit over society and environmental stewardship. This poses a threat to long-term economic stability, undermines efforts for environmental protection, and exacerbates social inequalities. The consequences are particularly dire in developing economies, where irresponsible and exploitative business practices can have far-reaching repercussions. Zhao (2021) reveals that business education program often falls short in preparing their recipients to confront the

challenges of ethical leadership and environmental challenges. As a result, many graduates lack the skills to balance financial goals with the social and environmental responsibilities of their host communities. This gap underscores the urgent need for business education to go beyond merely imparting technical and managerial skills. It must intentionally cultivate ethical leadership that integrates CSR principles into daily decision-making processes. Without such integration, future leaders may struggle to advocate for sustainable practices, hindering organizations from making meaningful and lasting contributions to social well-being and environmental conservation. To address this deficiency, it is crucial to explore how embedding CSR within academic curricula can foster leaders who are both ethically principled and socially accountable. This approach can ultimately enhance economic resilience while promoting environmental sustainability.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine how Corporate Social Responsibility can be integrated into business education as a means of fostering ethical leadership that

contributes to economic and environmental resilience. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. investigate how CSR principles are integrated into business education curricula in fostering ethical leaders
2. assess the extent of CSR in business education curricula impacts the development of environmental resilience among students.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are CSR principles integrated into business education programs to inculcate ethical leaders among students?
2. How does CSR incorporation into business education curricula impact the development of environmental resilience among students?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: CSR principles do not significantly impact the curriculum of business education on ethical leaders

H₀₂: Integrating CSR into business education curricula has no significant influence on the environmental resilience among students.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to assess the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of the respondents. The population of the study

consisted of 200 final-year business education students drawn from three (3) Nigerian universities with accredited business education programs. The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire tag: Corporate social responsibility, ethical leaders, and environmental resilience (CSREE) to extract information from the respondents. The questionnaire Items were on a four-point Likert scale, with responses from Very High Extent (4) to Very Low Extent (1). To ensure the instrument accurately reflected the content of the study, both face and content validity were verified by experts in the Business Education and test measurement

department of AbdulKadir Kure University, Niger state. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha and yielded a coefficient of 0.86, which indicates strong internal consistency. The questionnaire was administered electronically via Google Forms. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequency counts, were used to address the research questions. For inferential analysis, simple regression was employed to test the hypotheses, utilizing a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$)

Results

Research Question One

To what extent are CSR principles integrated into business education programs to foster ethical leaders for sustainable economic development?

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	CSR principles are included in course contents of business education program	1.68	0.22	LE
2.	CSR-related case studies are used in teaching and learning of business education courses	1.55	0.38	LE
3.	Ethical leadership is emphasized in the student's assessment	1.61	0.90	LE
4.	CSR concepts are connected to societal	2.13	0.63	LE

	economic development			
5.	CSR principles are emphasized in students course assessments and projects execution.	2.22	0.62	LE
	Weighted average	1.83	0.55	LE

The results presented in Table 1 reveal a generally low extent of CSR integration across all the evaluated items, with a weighted average score of 1.83 and SD = 0.55. The findings suggest that CSR principles are present in business education programs, but their incorporation remains minimal and lacks strong emphasis in the

method of teaching, strategic assessment, and overall curriculum design. This indicates the need for more focused efforts in embedding CSR comprehensively into the business education program to effectively equip the students as ethical leaders who can drive and contribute to sustainable economic development

Research Question Two

Assess how integrating CSR into business education curricula impacts the development of environmental resilience

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	CSR-related topics included in the curriculum of business education have improve my understanding and awareness of environmental sustainability.	1.15	0.57	LE
2.	Learning CSR principles has motivated me to adopt eco-friendly practices in my daily life.	1.84	0.71	LE
3.	CSR projects and assignments enhance my understand on how to address environmental challenges.	1.61	0.90	LE
4.	CSR concepts are associated with economic Development	2.13	0.63	LE

5.	CSR equipped the students' projects on specific environmental challenges that will illuminate their practical skills.	2.22	0.62	LE
	Weighted average	2.13	0.68	LE

The data in Table 2 indicate a generally low extent, with a weighted average of 2.13 and a Standard deviation of 0.68. Overall, this suggests that while CSR is incorporated into the curriculum, its impact on enhancing environmental resilience among students is relatively weak. The findings suggest that business education programs have yet to leverage CSR integration to improve

students' capacity for environmental resilience. This underscores the need for curriculum developers, business educators, and policymakers to reinforce CSR components in business education programs in order to foster greater environmental responsibility and effective advocates for sustainability.

Testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: CSR principles have not been significantly integrated into business education programs, hindering students' ethical leadership.

Table 3:

Simple Regression analysis of CSR on ethical leadership

Variables	PPMC	Mean	SD	Beta	R2	F
Ethical Leadership	0.76	3.05	0.78	0.61*	0.35	21.05

P<0.05

The result of the simple regression analysis presented in Table 3 shows that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles have a strong and positive impact on ethical leadership for sustainable economic growth.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient of 0.76 indicates a strong positive association between CSR principles and the cultivation of ethical leadership development. The regression coefficient

(Beta = 0.61) is statistically significant at $p < .05$ level, which affirms that CSR principles significantly predict the ethical leadership development among business education students.

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.35$) reveals that CSR principles contribute to 35% of the difference in ethical leadership, while the remaining 65% is explained by other factors not addressed in the analysis. The F-ratio of 21.05 also indicates the regression model is statistically significant, highlighting the importance of integrating CSR principles

into business curricula in shaping ethical leadership skills. These findings suggest that embedding CSR in the curriculum of business education enhances the students' ability to act with integrity, accountability, and social responsibility, ultimately equipping them to be ethical leaders who can drive sustainable economic development.

H02: Incorporating CSR into business education curricula has no significant impact on the development of environmental resilience.

Table 4:

Simple Regression of CSR on the development of environmental resilience

Variables	PPMC	Mean	SD	Beta	R2	F
Environmental resilience	0.82	3.00	1.12	0.71*	0.30	0.18

$P < 0.05$

Table 4 illustrates the results of findings of a simple regression analysis that examines how CSR enhances the development of environmental resilience of business education students. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient of 0.82 reveals a strong positive relationship between CSR and environmental resilience, implying that CSR boosts students' ability to

develop environmental resilience. The regression coefficient (Beta = 0.71, $p < 0.05$) reveals that CSR has a statistically significant and positive effect on environmental resilience. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.30$) indicates that CSR accounts for 30% of the variance in students' environmental resilience, while the remaining 70% is due to other variables not

captured by the model and the F-ratio of 0.18, though reported, appears unusually low given the high correlation ($r = 0.82$) and significant Beta.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study in research question one and its related hypothesis show that the integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into business education significantly enhances the development of ethical leadership skills among students. The regression results reveal a positive relationship between the integration of CSR and ethical leadership ($r = .76$; $\beta = .61$, $p < .05$), accounting for 35% of the variance in students' ethical orientation. This suggests that students who engage in CSR enhance their ability to act with integrity, accountability, and fairness, which are fundamental in promoting sustainable economic development. These findings align with the submission of Awad and Martin-Rojas (2024), which underscores the essential role of ethical leadership in strengthening governance and organizational legitimacy in a competitive landscape. Wahyuni et al. (2024) argue that integrating ethical leadership within CSR frameworks boosts organizational credibility and builds

stakeholder trust. The findings from research question two and its associated hypothesis reveal that integrating CSR has a significant effect on the development of environmental resilience among business education students. The regression analysis demonstrated a strong correlation ($r = .82$; $\beta = .71$, $p < .05$), indicating that CSR accounts for 30% of the variance in students' capacity to adapt to and manage ecological challenges effectively. This result suggested that business education students exposed to CSR-based curricula are more likely to embrace sustainable practices, such as responsible resource management and risk mitigation strategies. These outcomes align with the findings of Egbetola and Oyewole (2024), who suggested that CSR-driven initiatives improve environmental sustainability outcomes by enhancing organizational green capabilities. Similarly, Oko-Joseph and Chinagozi (2023) also highlighted that integrating CSR into academic programs equips students with skills to address global sustainability challenges by linking theoretical knowledge to practical environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

The study underscores the vital role of integrating Corporate Social Responsibility principles into business education programs to promote ethical leadership and enhance environmental resilience. To effectively prepare students for the complexities of today's business environment, CSR should be woven throughout the curriculum instead of being treated as a secondary topic. Effective strategies in business education programs include sustainability simulations and community service projects, to connect the students with real-world challenges and deepen their understanding of business practices in line with global best practices. By implication, these strategies would improve the students' leadership skills, ethical reasoning, and environmental awareness. Similarly, fostering robust collaborations between industry and universities would provide the students with mentorship opportunities and practical exposure to CSR initiatives, thereby enriching the students' educational experience. This approach helps to develop graduates who possess not only managerial and technical competencies but also foresting practice and competencies needed in promoting sustainable development. By

embracing such a holistic model, business education programs can create more engaging and impactful learning environments that support economic stability, environmental protection, and the long-term welfare of society.

Recommendation

1. CSR principles should be integrated across all business education courses to prepare the students with an ability centred on accountability and uphold sustainable development in their professional careers.
2. Universities should incorporate sustainability projects and community learning into business education programs, as well as industrial partnerships, to enhance the students' skills and foster awareness of environmental sustainability.

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