



University-Community Participation: Commitment To Social Responsibility Of Its Stakeholders

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Abstract

This study focuses its objective on evaluating the interaction of the university with society in favour of a more human and sustainable development from the perception of its internal groups. The research is approached through a descriptive quantitative approach framed in three phases. The first phase contemplates the theoretical review of experts in the study phenomenon, followed by field work using the methodology proposed in the manual of first steps of the RSU, applying as an instrument the questionnaire to internal agents: students, teachers and staff. The results reflect that the university strata are concerned about social problems, solidarity and volunteering are promoted, however, it is necessary to increase this interaction with the purpose of achieving even more collective growth.

Keywords: Social responsibility; social participation; community; internal groups; social issues; volunteering.

1. Introduction

At the business level, organizations have shown a growing interest in involving the social environment within their policies and actions as an organization, the purpose of this is to respond responsibly for the negative effects they may cause on their community; for this, they execute practices that in the normal exercise of their operations generate a noticeable benefit on the environment in which they operate, making internal projections that now, beyond the financial, have a social focus. This same level of awareness has reached the academy, where social responsibility has become more than a concept and has become a reality that also falls on educational institutions in which its objective should not only be formative, but should also promote equality, respect, ethics and environmental care (Ahumada Tello, Ravina Ripoll, & López Regalado, 2018).

Responsible management by universities presents its own term, becoming known as University Social Responsibility (RSU, from now on), which has been consolidated as an important pillar within the management policy of Universities since the early 90s, forming part of both the educational level and the policies that pursue excellence and quality of education, however, despite being a current issue that

revolutionizes the management of the academy, it presents a number of limitations among which stand out: The little research on USR with the constructive approach of a healthy society from the students' point of view, the scarcity of scenarios that allow university-student interaction in the formulation of action plans and the lack of commitment when linking within the educational strategy the incentive of social practice (Martínez Usarralde, Lloret Catalá, & Mas Gil, 2017).

In a conceptual scope, the USR constitutes a management that based on principles of ethical and moral character involves all areas and processes executed by the university, with the unanimous purpose of counteracting the negative effects that such processes directly or indirectly may cause on the stakeholders involved with the institution, going on to analyze social, economic and environmental dimensions (Gómez, Alvarado Naveira, & Pujols Bernabel, 2018). In the same way, USR is also qualified by some authors as a determinant for universities to have a differentiating factor among the mentioned dimensions, framed in community welfare through interaction with the population, research and teaching processes (Yampufé Cornetero, Antezana Alzamora, Najarro Vargas, & Oriundo Gates, 2021); that is why USR is positioned as a key point when dealing with issues concerning university sustainability.

When considering the scope of this responsibility, it is impossible to ignore the advantage that universities have in terms of social influence, since as educational institutions they professionally train and prepare citizens for the world, and it would be wonderful if such a mission had the added value of inducing in professionals a culture and philosophy of responsible life, so that they become fair and equitable citizens, whose actions tend to the common good; due to the fact that the RSU must have the strength to morally influence the student, to achieve that when he/she graduates he/she acquires Social Responsibility, in such a way that he/she does not leave it at the university, but keeps it for his/her life, as a commitment to be applied in the personal and work environment (Alonzo Godoy, Ayora Herrera, & Bote Caamal, 2016).

The foundation of the RSU begins in the ethical and moral contour, this makes that an idealistic vision for change is created in the institution, in which the indifference towards the negative realities of the community is set aside and gives way to improvement actions and proposition of solutions (Sanabria Martínez, 2017), because it is clear that every action performed has a consequence, whether it is negative or positive, depends directly on who executes it (Nvas Rios & Romero Gonzalez, 2016). In addition, the commitment of the RSU must be common and constant, focusing on strengthening the bonds of the society-University relationship (Condori & Reyna, 2019).

On the other hand, Valleys, et al. (2009) make an important theoretical contribution to the whole subject concerning USR by identifying, among other things, the types of impacts generated by universities, as reflected in Figure 1, where it covers impacts of type:

- Organizational: Because universities, like any other entity, also have a staff for its operation.
- Cognitive: Because in its work it generates knowledge.
- Social: Because it has the power to create social capital.
- Educational: Because it influences people's academic training.

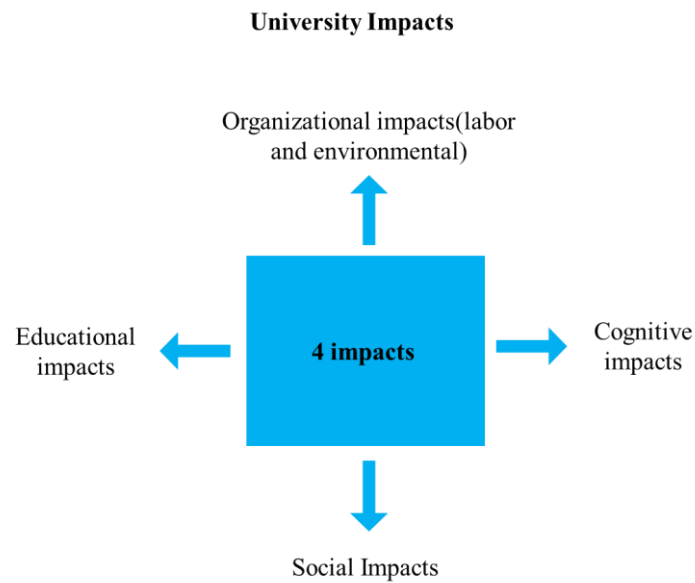


Figure 1. University Impacts. **Source:** Illustration adapted from (Vallaey, De la Cruz, & Sasia, 2009). *University Social Responsibility: First steps manual* (p. 8).

Similarly, based on the impacts identified, these authors specify the stakeholders directly involved in USR, as shown in Figure 2.

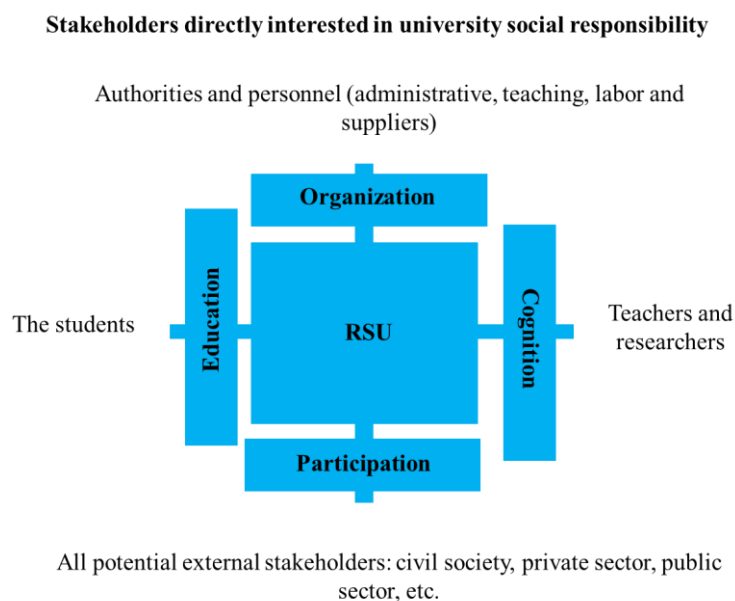


Figure 2. MSW Stakeholders. **Source:** Illustration adapted from (Vallaey, De la Cruz, & Sasia, 2009). *University Social Responsibility: First steps manual* (p. 12).

In addition to the analysis of the impact and stakeholders of the USR, in the broad study of this type of responsibility, Schwalb, et al. (2019) highlight as relevant to recognize the state of the internal management of universities, establishing a series of instructions to achieve it:

- To know the perception of the stakeholders: It consists of knowing the opinion of the stakeholders on the initiatives developed by the institution in favor of organizational, cognitive, educational and social impacts. It is important to emphasize that an effective instrument must be developed and applied to a representative sample that reflects the realistic perception of the population.
- Inventory the actions of the USR: For this purpose, the practices carried out by the different units of the university within the framework of the USR should be identified. This inventory should not only take into account the formal practices registered in the management plans, but should also include those carried out unofficially, by individual initiatives.
- Identify and analyze discrepancies and strengths: Knowing the opinion of the stakeholders and the actions carried out by the university, the necessary information is available to analyze the real and effective context of the initiatives and their perception, to draw conclusions in which discrepancies are identified in order to correct them and strengths to turn them into advantages.

With the clear focus on USR at the institutional level, it is also relevant to analyze it from the external perspective through social participation, which is recognized as the management that universities carry out immersed in their practices of social responsibility, creating favorable spaces for citizen participation, in which the society-university link is strengthened, giving rise to the intervention of the community on certain types of decisions, their opinions, needs are known and usually end up in the consolidation of social projects (Alfárez Villarreal, 2014); in the same way, by relating social participation together with community life, and Social Responsibility, form in unity the components of true change which begins with the rethinking of practices to be carried out within educational institutions (Sánchez Agudelo, 2017), i.e., the will, initiative, participation and voice of the community are needed for transformation to occur.

Under the ideal described above, when expecting changes to impact positively, it is paramount to articulate goals and indicators that contribute to the construction of projects on the community to be impacted (Cruz Rios & Carlson Morales, 2021), due to the fact that social action that is not focused, that is, executing initiatives without defined objectives and without their due justification, results in a deficient management system in which the projections and scope of the existing USR within the institution are completely unknown (Torres Acosta, 2020).

To avoid a blurring of the social mission by higher education institutions, it is necessary to recognize the need to strengthen both sides, both the university to rethink its management plan, and social participation so that communities are more integrated into the academic level, representing in some way a non-formal movement of progressive force (Rincón i Verdera, 2010).

Social participation becomes a main axis when universities try to establish relationships with their environment, defining the transversality of the same, through the need to make an effort to establish solid means that achieve good communication and give rise to active spaces for social participation (Yampufé Cornetero, Antezana Alzamora, Najarro Vargas, & Oriundo Gates, 2021). To this end, USR must become an institutional commitment immersed in strategic planning, with feasible and effective action plans.

However, it is important to highlight the importance of being clear that the social participation of USR is not equivalent to the social projection that higher education institutions may have, given that USR focuses on management that affirms its commitment to the environment and the community through the

reflection of values, actions, initiatives and strategies that contribute to the generation of a just and sustainable community. However, on the other hand, social projection makes reference to the university's mission approach, governed by principles that strengthen aspects such as the extension of its academic offer to the communities, the consolidation of unions, agreements and alliances with external entities that contribute both to the academy and to the development of the productive sector (Sanabria Martínez, 2017).

2. Method

The study is approached by means of a quantitative research with a descriptive approach framed in three phases. The first phase contemplates the theoretical review of experts in the study phenomenon, followed by field work using the methodology proposed in the manual of first steps of the RSU by Vallaey, F. (2009), using as an instrument the questionnaire applied to internal agents: students, teachers and staff. Likewise, the instrument was designed under the Likert scale where (1) is the extreme totally disagree and (5) the extreme totally agree to evaluate actions according to the operationalization matrix of variables as in the table 1.

Table 1. Matrix of operationalization of variables.

Variable	Scale	Validity
Promoting activities among the members of the academic community as agents of change	1-5	Relationship of the formative process at the academic level and the articulation with the competencies of being in the context of social projection. Social responsibility of the University in its area of influence.
of change	1-5	
Organization of forums and activities to address social and environmental issues.	1-5	
Promotion and motivation in volunteer activities	1-5	

The population is made up of the total number of students, teachers and administrative staff of the public accounting program, taking into account the requirements of the research and the size of the population, it is necessary to determine the sample as shown in the table 2.

Table 2. Population and sample of stakeholders.

Target population	Number of persons	Sample	% of participation
Students	798	296	37%
Teachers	58	50	86.21%
Administrative staff	35	33	94.29%

After the application of the instrument, a descriptive analysis was used as a basis through the SPSS technological tool that allows through statistics to identify trends, frequencies, variables and elaboration of graphic representations that show a useful and pertinent interpretation. Considering the results of the instrument and the analysis approached, the interaction of the public accounting program with society was evaluated.

3. Results

Given the importance of university social responsibility, this research identified and analyzed the perception of students, teachers and administrative staff regarding the good practices of University Social Responsibility in the "social participation" axis of the Public Accounting Program of the Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander Ocaña Colombia. At this point, the characterization of the USR is presented based on the results of the surveys applied to 296 students, 50 teachers and 33 administrative personnel who are part of the academic program under study (Figure 3).

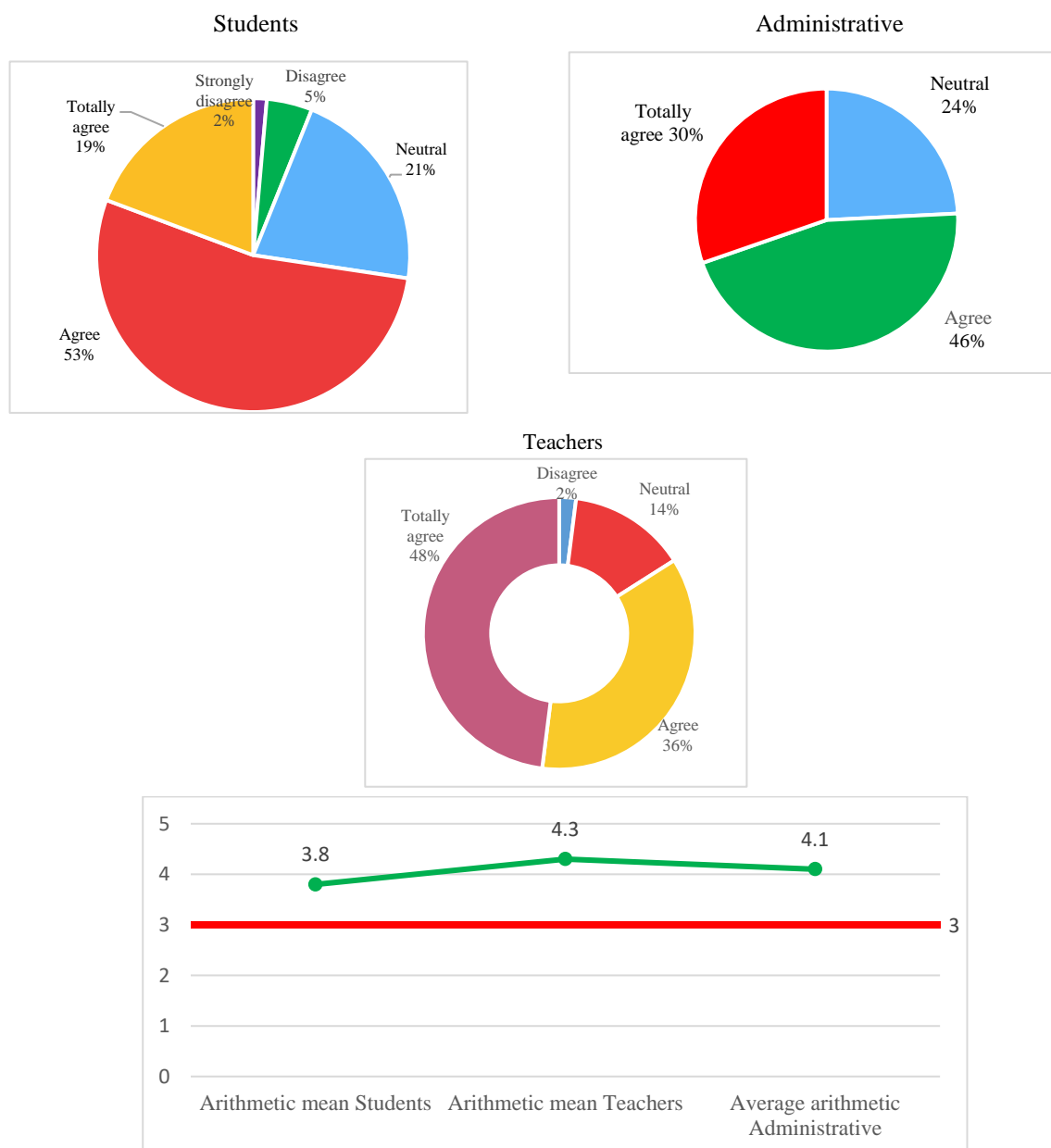
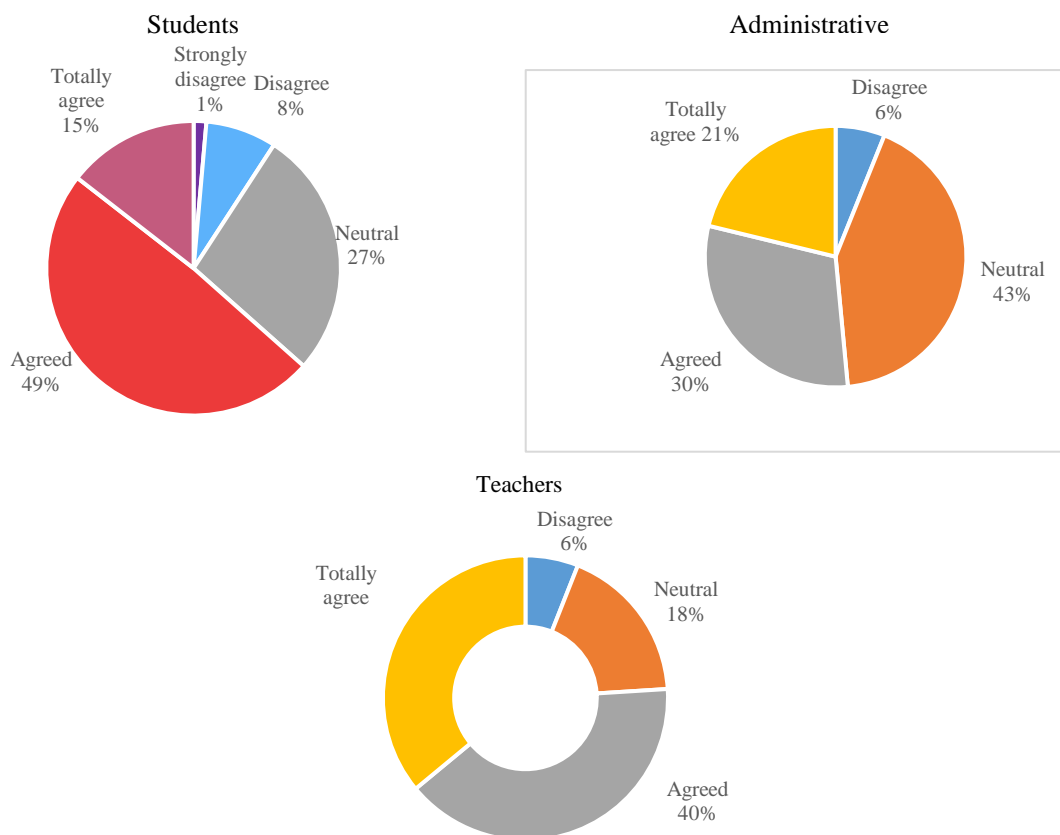


Figure 3. Promotion of activities among members of the academic community as agents of change.

The world has been experiencing significant changes in recent times that demand students, teachers and professionals with creativity, intelligence and productivity, which requires innovative educational strategies that turn them into agents of change not only at the university level but also at the social level. Hence, educational institutions are increasingly using didactic means as strategies that improve the appropriation of ideas by the student body and materialize positively in society (Muñoz-Hernández, Canabal-Guzmán, & Galarcio-Guevara, 2020).

The responsible actions of each of the members of the academic community both internally and externally of the campus, serve as a reflection of the strategies developed by the program, as well as the actions carried out to bring significant benefits to society. Consequently, this statement is supported by 72.7% of the students surveyed who note the program's interference in this issue, meanwhile, 21.3% were not in favor or against the idea raised in the statement and 6.1% did not agree with it. Regarding the teaching staff, the results show that 84% of the teachers perceive that the program is concerned about social problems, but there is a disparity with 14% of the teachers who did not show any favorability and 2% who disagreed with the statement made, which should be studied in depth. For the administrative staff, 76% of the employees stated that the actions carried out by the program are a reflection of their concern for the problems that burden the communities that are part of the areas of influence. It can be inferred that the three levels are concerned about social problems by exceeding the average of 3.8 for students and above 4.0 for teachers and administrative staff (Figure 4).



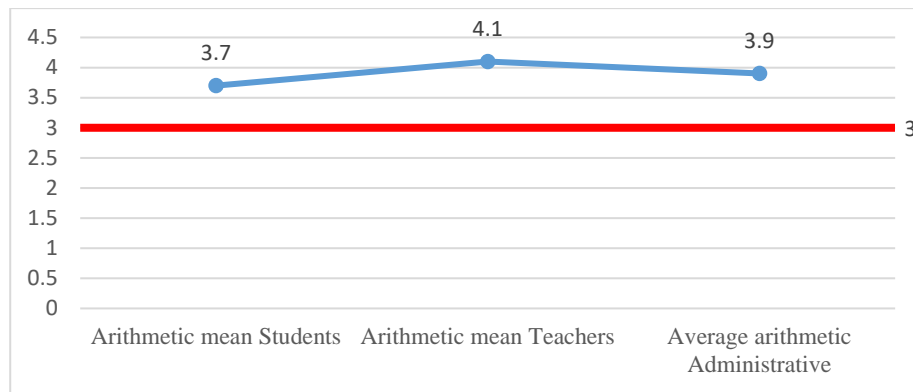
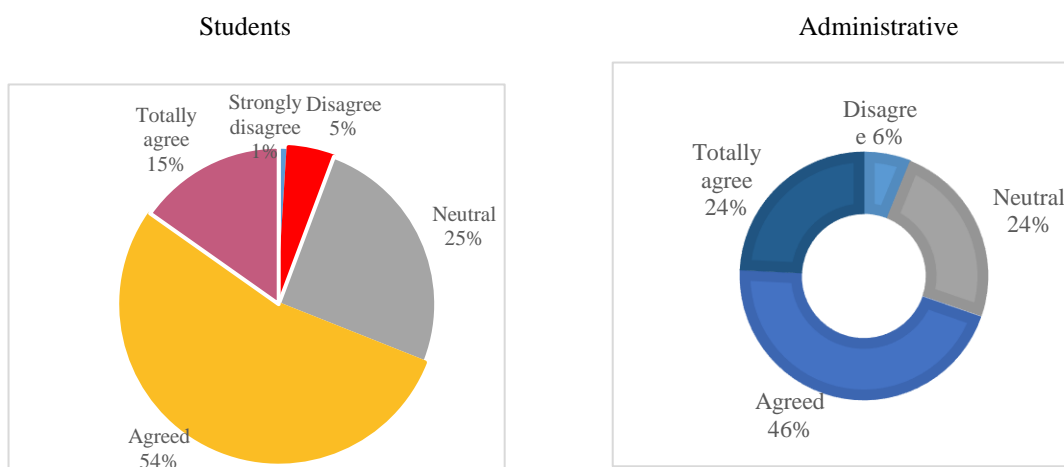


Figure 4. Organization of forums and activities to address social and environmental issues.

The development of activities that combine the problems that commonly afflict society, from which the SR policies of an institution are promoted, serve as a mechanism for participation and dynamic rapprochement between the actors involved. In this aspect, the students' point of view on the visibility and relevance of the forums and/or activities carried out to deal with the socio-environmental problems of the environment was reflected in 54% who agreed with the statement made, in contrast to 9.2% who totally or partially disagreed, so that this type of activities should be the focus of attention and continuous improvement. For the teaching staff, the RSU policies promoted by the university and the academic program have a positive perception and are a reflection of the socially responsible commitment that has been adopted, with 76% of the teachers agreeing partially or totally, while 6% disagreed. On the other hand, 42.4% of the administrative staff lacked clarity on the subject, while 51.5% of those surveyed stated that the program has strengths in socially responsible policies, only 6.1% disagreed. The average that oscillates between 3.7 and 4.1 in the three levels shows their commitment to address social and environmental issues through forums (Figure 5).

It is necessary to direct in the training of students work activities with the community that turn them into agents of change by proposing strategies to companies that provide solutions to organizational problems and respond to good practices of RSU, because as expressed by (Coronel - Nuñez, Velasco - Burgos, & Cárdenas - García, 2019), there is a need to continuously establish strategies in companies that help them to achieve a good development and high quality in the provision of services. Thus, the university must respond to meet these needs of the companies that are part of the business fabric where students become agents of development.



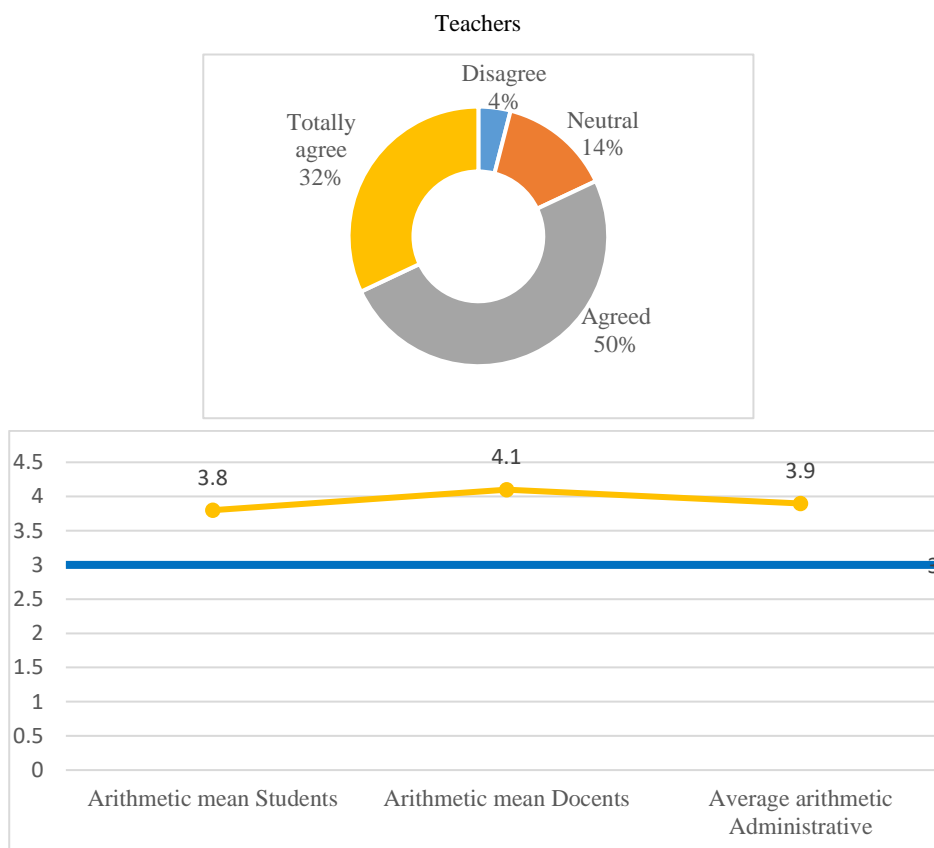


Figure 5. Promotion and motivation in volunteer activities.

The gestures of solidarity promoted by the program serve as a source of encouragement and approach of the strata with the citizen reality, as well as a deeper vision that critically turns them into agents of social change. The results show that 68.9% of the students agreed that there are volunteer programs promoted by the program and that they are encouraged in some way to participate. In contrast, 25.3% did not express a position in favour or against the statement, while the remaining 5.7% disagreed with it, thus perceiving that the strategies developed should be more efficient in order to capture the attention of young people and include them in university social outreach programs. When the teachers were asked about the visibility of the actions taken by the program in this aspect, 82% confirmed that they witnessed it; while the rest of the population did not perceive that these were sufficient or efficient. For the administrative staff, 69.7% of the participating sample partially or totally agreed that the program promotes and motivates its employees to be included in volunteer activities, with 24.2% who were not totally convinced by this statement and 6.1% who disagreed. However, the averages indicate that the three levels promote solidarity and volunteering with their stakeholders, without disregarding the fact that this action should be encouraged even more (Figure 6).

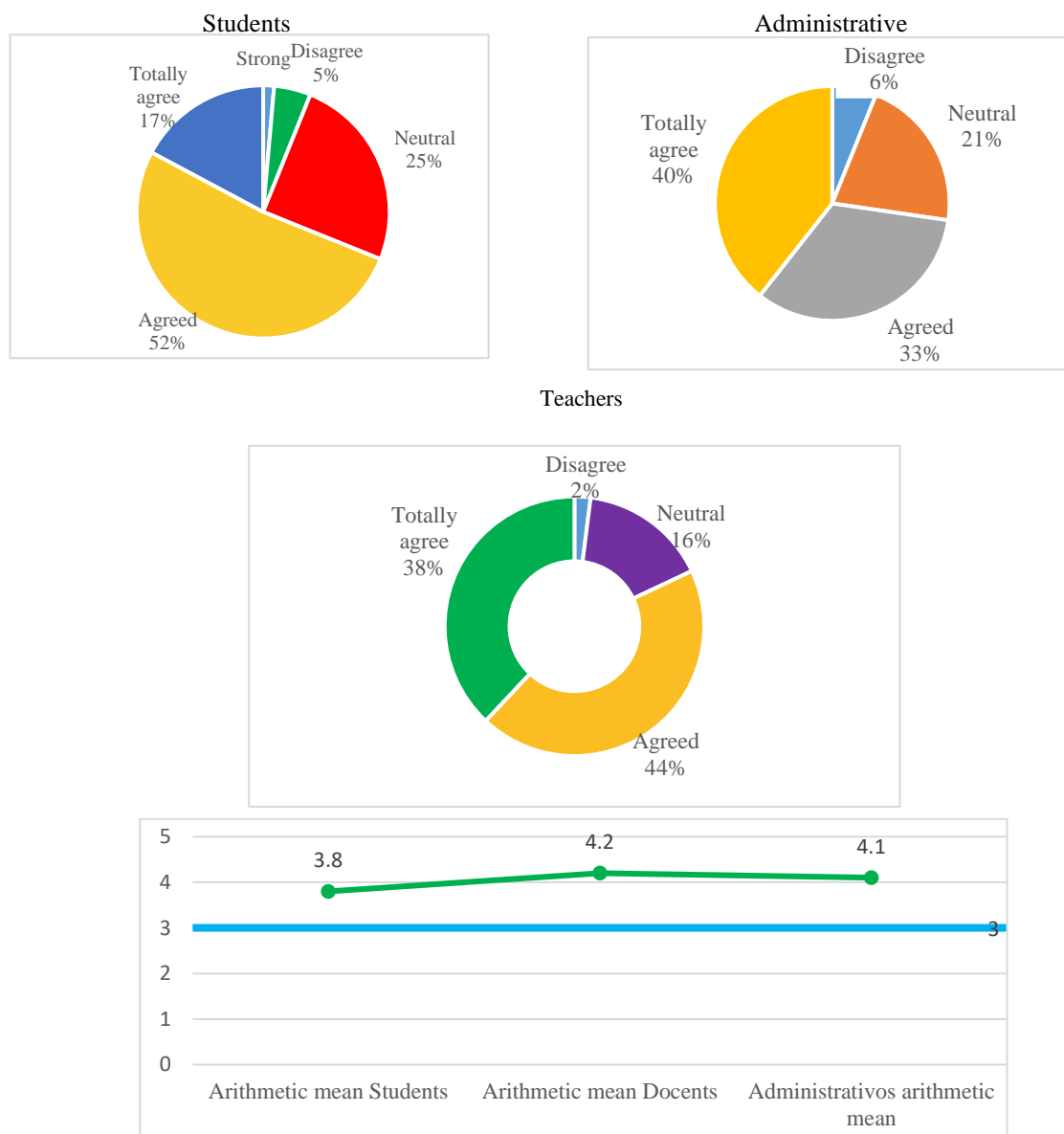


Figure 6. Interaction of the different levels with different sectors of society

The way in which the program promotes the interaction of the university community with the different social sectors is of great relevance, hence 68.9% of the students surveyed stated that they are witnesses of the actions and mechanisms implemented to encourage them to learn about the reality of the environment in general; meanwhile, 25% of the sample are not aware or were simply neutral towards the development of this type of activities and another 6.1% disagreed. The teaching staff presented positive perceptions, with 82% agreeing. The perception of the members of their work teams is of vital importance, and it was also noted that 72.7% of the officials participating in the program do promote interaction with different social actors. However, 6.1% do not agree that the development of this type of actions stimulates the improvement of citizen participation strategies and social interaction of the members. Likewise, the averages that oscillate between 3.8 and 4.2 ratify the interaction of the university community with society (Figurer 7).

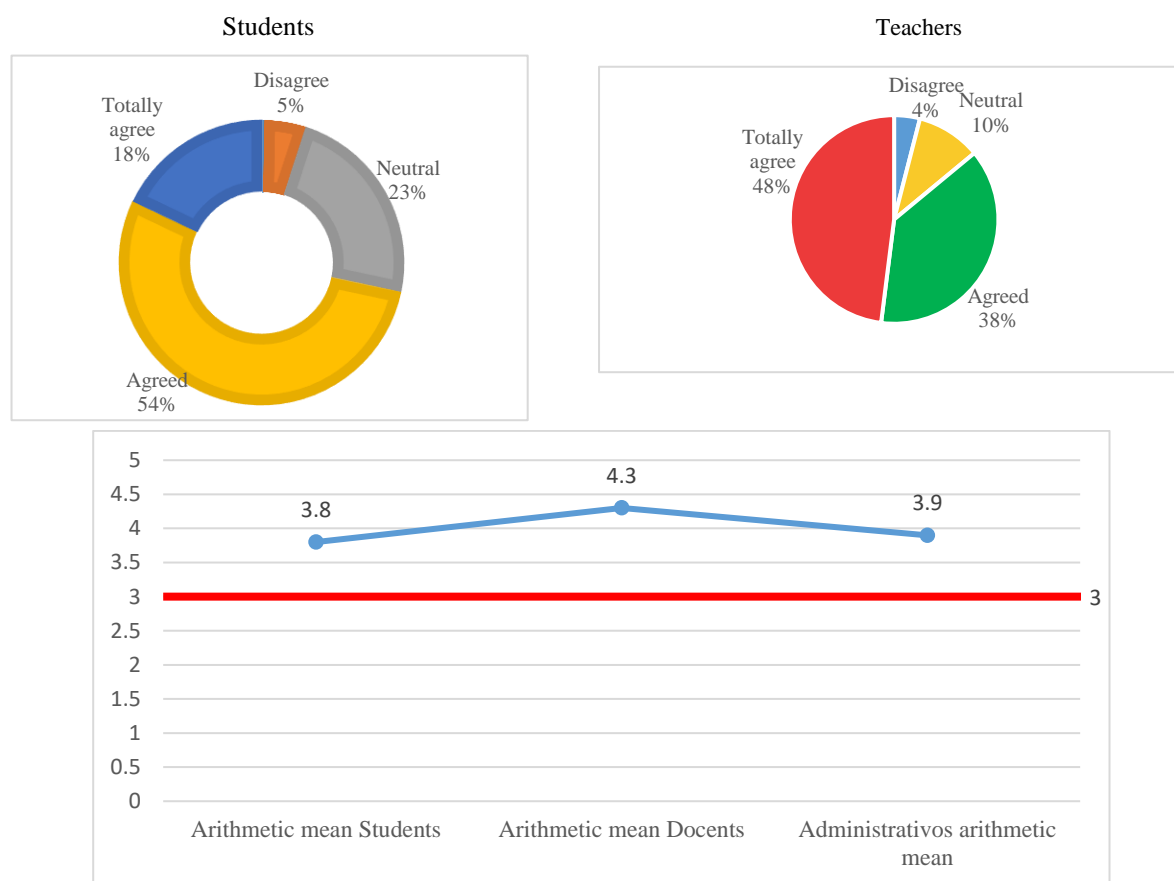


Figure 7. Carrying out activities that benefit the surrounding community.

University Social Responsibility includes a number of aspects and actions that together contribute to society in general and each of its members to participate in collective growth, making significant contributions. However, for this, emphasis must be made on the promotion of activities that strengthen culture, promote the protection of the environment and provide solutions to the socio-economic problems of a region; this is confirmed by 71.6% of the students when reflecting their perception of the actions developed from the program, compared to 5% who did not agree, making it visible that a small improvement is needed in terms of communication of this type of events. For the teachers, a relatively positive panorama could be perceived, 86% of the teachers totally or partially agreed with such statement. However, 10% did not agree or disagreed and the remaining 4% disagreed. The averages ranging between 3.8 and 4.3 show positively the benefits of society in the interaction with university estates, however, it is required to increase this interaction with the purpose of achieving even more collective growth.

In this sense, Sissa (2015), states that although for many authors teaching, management, research and extension are the most important processes within the framework of USR, to create a sustainable society, universities must interact and share experiences that allow them to reinforce weaknesses and enhance strengths, always trying to create ties of support and integration with their stakeholders in search of common achievements.

4. Conclusions

The responsible interaction between the academic community and society forges ties that bring significant benefits to the community, hence this responsible action is reflected in the fact that the public

accounting program makes responsible bets to address social issues and become agents of change by strengthening relations between the university and the community. Likewise, the public accounting program promotes solidarity and volunteering, fostering human and sustainable development.

The University Social Responsibility includes a number of aspects and actions that together contribute to society in general and each of its members to participate in the collective growth, making significant contributions. However, for this, emphasis must be placed on the promotion of activities that strengthen the culture, promote environmental protection and provide solutions to socio-economic problems of a region, hence the public accounting program at UFPS Ocaña, is committed to train qualified professionals committed to society and the environment.

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