

Guidelines to enhance stakeholder management in higher education institutions

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421

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Abstract

Purpose – The relationship with internal and external actors on the part of higher education institutions (HEIs) is a fundamental factor for them to fully exercise their role in sustainable development and the evolution of individuals, organizations and society as a whole. In this sense, this study aims to analyze the literature about stakeholder management in HEIs and to provide guidelines to support managers of HEIs to enhance stakeholder management practices.

Design/methodology/approach – This research was conducted through a bibliometric analysis followed by a content analysis to propose the guidelines to support HEIs' managers in improving stakeholder management practices.

Findings – The guidelines were proposed for each of the following seven areas: engagement and governance; innovation and knowledge management; education for sustainable development; responsible research,



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innovation and collaborative partnerships; organisational change management; social responsibility; and performance management and sustainability report.

Originality/value – Although the topic addressed has gained traction in the academic community, the literature fails to provide guidelines to support managers of HEIs enhance stakeholder management practices. From a theoretical standpoint, the increasing recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement reflects a paradigm shift in understanding sustainability and social responsibility in HEIs. On a practical level, managers can use the guidelines to promote effective dialogue, increase stakeholder engagement and collaborative partnerships.

Keywords Higher education institutions, University, Stakeholder engagement, Stakeholder management, Bibliometric analysis, Sustainable development, Guidelines

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are indispensable organizations for driving society toward sustainable development (SD) (Nicolo *et al.*, 2020). It is fundamental that HEIs take responsibility for the externalities of their policies, strategies and structures, as well as to support society's long-term economic, ecological, social, environmental and technological development (Kiezel *et al.*, 2021; Vallaey *et al.*, 2022). In order for HEIs to fully fulfill this role, it is necessary to build meaningful and consistent relationships with various stakeholders, such as the academic community, businesses, governments and society (Crocco *et al.*, 2022; Ferrero-Ferrero *et al.*, 2018).

Even though much has been said about the role of HEIs in the transition to sustainability, further research into the dynamics of the link between HEIs and their ecosystem is needed to support this transition (Lozano *et al.*, 2015). This is closely related to stakeholder engagement, which involves a collaborative process of social learning, where various stakeholders come together with a shared vision, mission and values to align institutional practices with societal expectations in pursuit of sustainable goals (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2019; Crocco *et al.*, 2022). Researchers have argued about the need to understand that the potential of HEIs to contribute to their own and their stakeholders' sustainable development necessarily involves strengthening strategic partnerships for sustainable development (Ramos-Monge *et al.*, 2019). In this scenario, University Social Responsibility (USR) is gaining increasing importance and countries worldwide (e.g. European countries and Taiwan) are motivating universities to further develop it (Hsieh, 2019). As evidenced by Latif *et al.* (2022), USR takes to HEIs' reality the concept of corporate social responsibility, established for companies to make efforts toward sustainability beyond their legal obligations. In general, USR can be understood as a transformative approach developed considering the assumptions of the stakeholder's theory (Freeman, 1984), urging HEIs to take responsibility for the externalities of their policies, strategies and structures, as well as to support society's long-term economic, ecological, social, environmental and technological development (Esfijani *et al.*, 2013; Kiezel *et al.*, 2021; Vallaey *et al.*, 2022). In addition, in the context of HEIs, the USR presents an important additional consequence: a positive effect on students' thinking, engagement and acting regarding social aspects, e.g. empathy and solidarity (Asrar-ul-Haq *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, the role of HEIs regarding the development of the awareness and knowledge in students about sustainable development is evidenced in the SDG 4 (Quality Education) (UN, 2015).

According to Rahman *et al.* (2019), the importance of partnerships for HEIs has grown as their goals expand beyond education and research to include the socioeconomic development of local communities. In this regard, Esposito *et al.* (2021) highlighted the call for HEIs to enhance their communication with stakeholders concerning social responsibility matters. The demand for effective communication and relationship channels between HEIs and their stakeholders has further intensified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Gonzalez-Perez *et al.*, 2021;

Harin *et al.*, 2023). Although the relevance of communication with stakeholders has grown recently, the ISO 26000 (ISO, 2010), published in 2010 already evidenced the relevance of organizations to be transparent regarding their activities that may present sustainability-related impacts. The relevance and synergies between communication with stakeholders and sustainability aspects is also evidenced in the literature (Taljaard and de Beer, 2019). In their study, Taljaard and de Beer (2019) evidenced that an effective communication can generate a co-value that enhances stakeholders' engagement and that the integrative communication can directly impacts the sustainability of a company. The authors also emphasize that the particularities of each type of institution should be considered. In the context of HEIs, Di Tullio *et al.* (2021) show examples of institutions that use sustainability reporting as a mean to engage stakeholders and to stimulate a culture of sustainability. In Saraite-Sariene *et al.* (2019), the authors highlight the need for transparency to increase stakeholders' commitment.

All these arguments demonstrate the clear importance of stakeholder management for HEIs, specially in the context of sustainable development. Indeed, this has motivated researchers to devote significant efforts for studying this topic from various perspectives, whether with specific focuses such as knowledge management (Adhikari and Shrestha, 2023), the achievement of SDG 4 (quality education) targets (Shabalala and Ngcwangu, 2021), and with broader objectives such as systematic literature reviews (Crocco *et al.*, 2022). However, the literature fails to provide guidelines to help managers of HEIs to enhance stakeholder management practices. When the literature about stakeholders' management in the context of HEIs is analyzed, the only paper considering guidelines is focused on risk management (Fernandes *et al.*, 2022). The relevance of stakeholders' management to the sustainability of organizations and the scarcity of literature regarding guidelines for these organizations to conduct this management is also evidenced in other sectors (Rathobei *et al.*, 2024). When the HEIs and their role preparing future professionals are considered, the need of these guidelines is even greater (Borsatto *et al.*, 2024). Given the presented context and aiming to contribute to address this issue, the following research questions (RQ) guided this study:

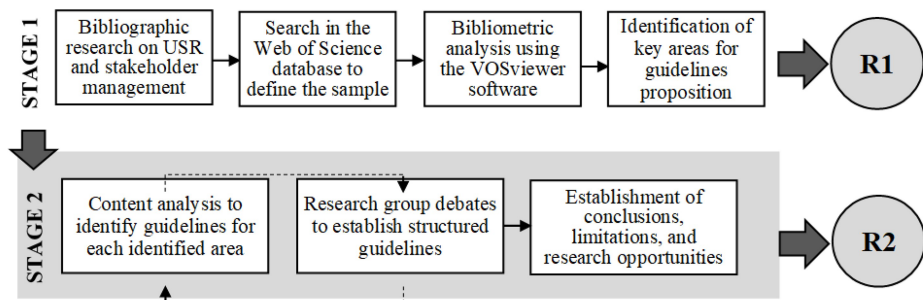
- RQ1. When considering stakeholder management, what are the areas related to the theme in which it is possible to propose guidelines to support HEIs' managers in reaching better results?
- RQ2. Based on the existing knowledge on the subject, what guidelines can be developed to assist HEIs' managers in improving stakeholder management toward sustainable development?

Considering the relevance of the literature to base scientific research (Zupic and Čater, 2015), we addressed RQ1 by identifying, reviewing and using a bibliometric software to analyze 94 papers discussing stakeholder management and engagement in the context higher education. This allowed the identification of the main areas in which guidelines could be proposed to support HEI's managers. The findings from RQ1 were as the foundation to address RQ2, wherein guidelines were developed for each of these identified areas based on academic research and internationally recognized reference models such as International Organization for Standardization (ISO), Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), among others.

In the next section, the methodological procedures are presented.

2. Methodological procedures

This research was organized in two stages to address the research questions (RQ1 and RQ2). Figure 1 illustrates the sequential steps and methods used.



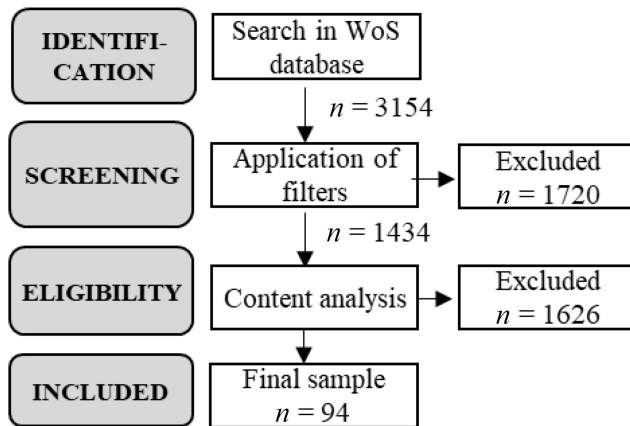
Source: Authors' own work

Figure 1. Research stages and steps to conduct the study

In Stage 1, the research steps were carried out to address *RQ1*. Initially, a bibliographic research was conducted on USR and stakeholder management to establish a theoretical foundation. This step was important in defining the main concepts and keywords to be used in the subsequent step, which involved searching for relevant literature on stakeholder management within the context of HEIs. The search was performed in the Web of Science database, which is widely recognized as one of the most important scientific databases and has been extensively used in similar research studies (Santana and Cobo, 2020). The decision to use a single database was made to ensure the consistency of the data set. The title, abstract and keywords of the studies were searched using a string that combined the following terms: (“universities” OR “university” OR “HEI” OR “higher education institution”) AND (“multi-stakeholder” OR “stakeholder”) AND (“engagement” OR “participation” OR “involvement”). The selection of this string was established after a careful analysis of possible combinations. The time period was limited from 2015 to February 2022, and only articles published in journals were included. The focus on papers published from 2015 onwards is justified by the publication of Agenda 2030, which has contributed to an improved understanding of multi-stakeholder engagement, as highlighted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (UNDESA, 2020).

The initial search yielded 3154 records. The filters applied (time period and type of document) reduced to 1,434 records. The PRISMA protocol (Moher, 2009) was used to assess the relevance of each study by analyzing the title, abstract and keywords of all articles, resulting in 481 articles. Then, content analysis was used to identify 94 relevant articles, forming the sample used for the bibliometric analysis. While the excluded papers mentioned the keywords from the search string, this evaluation process revealed that they were outside the research scope as their primary focus was not on stakeholder management/engagement in the context of HEIs. This process is outlined in Figure 2.

The final sample of 94 articles was used to perform the bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer software (van Eck and Waltman, 2010). The initial step involved the development of a thesaurus file to accurately count words that lack significant differences but are identified as distinct terms by the software. For instance, synonyms, plural and singular forms, and words with similar meanings but different spellings were merged using the thesaurus file. As an illustration, the terms “higher-education” and “higher education” were consolidated, allowing the software to treat them as a single cluster. Similarly, terms like “universities,” “university,” and “HEI” were standardized to “higher education institution” for better cohesion. It is worth noting that the legal aspects of classification or institutional



Source: Authors' own work

Figure 2. Process of search, evaluation and definition of the sample

size were not the primary focus when selecting articles for the study and were not used to differentiate HEIs. Instead, the emphasis was on the significance of institutions offering higher education courses in delivering sustainable development-aligned knowledge, fostering stakeholder engagement and showcasing relevant experiences. The utilization of the thesaurus file resulted in a reduction of words from 611 to 521.

The analysis conducted using VOSviewer encompassed several key aspects:

- number of documents published per year;
- co-authorship network among countries;
- co-authorship networks among authors;
- the most cited journals; the most cited studies;
- word co-occurrence network with a minimum of 5 citations and subsequent thematic cluster analysis; and
- word co-occurrence network based on the publication year.

In essence, these analyses provided comprehensive insights into the publication trends, collaborations, citations and thematic connections within the studied documents. VOSviewer facilitated a holistic understanding of the research landscape and allowed for a nuanced exploration of interrelationships among various components, which resulted in the identification of key areas related to stakeholder management for guidelines proposition.

After identifying the key areas, stage 2 was initiated. For each of these areas, academic works and internationally renowned reference models were identified as a foundation for developing guidelines. The content analysis was performed following the method proposed by Elo and Kyngäs (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008), which consists of three phases. The preparation phase included identifying key references for each area and selecting guidelines as the unit of analysis. The organizing phase involved coding, grouping, categorization and abstraction, allowing the establishment of several guidelines according to the defined areas. Finally, the resulting phase was based on an iterative process of analysis and discussion of the findings.

The research group engaged in extensive discussions to consolidate and establish well-structured guidelines for each key area. The aim of these guidelines was to provide comprehensive assistance to HEI managers in enhancing stakeholder management practices.

The last step of the study consisted of establishing the conclusions, limitations and future research opportunities.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Findings from bibliometric analysis

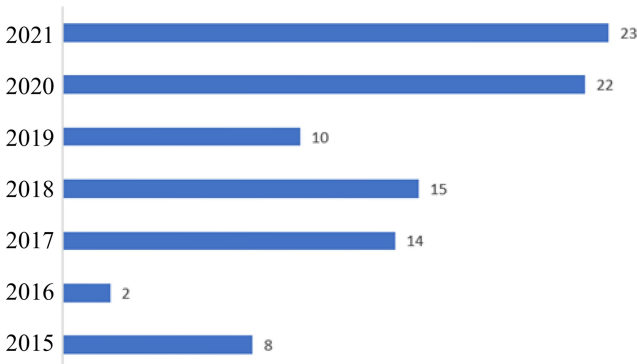
Figure 3 shows the number of documents published from 2015 to 2021.

Based on the results depicted in Figure 3, it becomes evident that the theme of multi-stakeholder engagement has garnered increasing importance in recent years within the realm of HEIs. The figure demonstrates a noticeable upward trend in the number of articles addressing this topic, albeit with minor declines observed in 2016 and 2019. This observation further fuels discussions surrounding how HEIs can effectively contribute to sustainable development, aligning with the viewpoints expressed by authors such as Corazza and Saluto (2021) and Munir et al. (2022).

Regarding the references cited in the sample, a prominent academic reference considering the number of citations is Freeman’s classic work titled “Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach” (Freeman, 1984). The high number of citations of this reference can be justified by its notable contribution to the field. Langrafe et al. (2020) describe this book as a seminal work in the literature on stakeholder theory. Table 1 shows other noteworthy studies highlighted within the sample.

Focusing on keywords of the documents (mentioned by authors and included by database), a co-occurrence study was conducted. Figure 4 visually represents the co-occurrence word network using nodes, while Figure 5 uses term density to depict the clusters.

Based on these figures, five clusters were identified. In the yellow cluster, the words “higher education institution,” “stakeholders,” “engagement,” are closely associated with the core of our study, emphasizing the importance of HEIs involving stakeholders in their planning and execution processes to foster sustainable development (Chan, 2021). However, the participation of HEIs in projects such as joint ventures of research may not be desired by



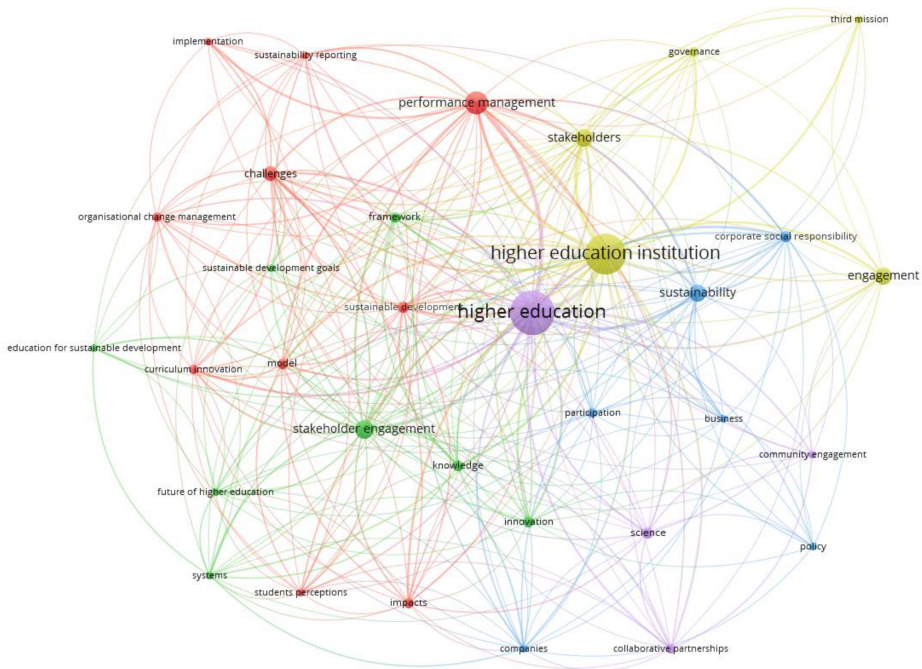
Source: Data generated from WoS

Figure 3. Distribution of sample articles by year of publication

Table 1. Most cited references in the sample

References	Citations
Freeman (1984)	17
Lozano <i>et al.</i> (2013)	12
Lozano (2006a)	11
Mitchell <i>et al.</i> (1997)	11
Jongbloed <i>et al.</i> (2008)	10
Lozano (2006b)	9
Cortese (2003)	8

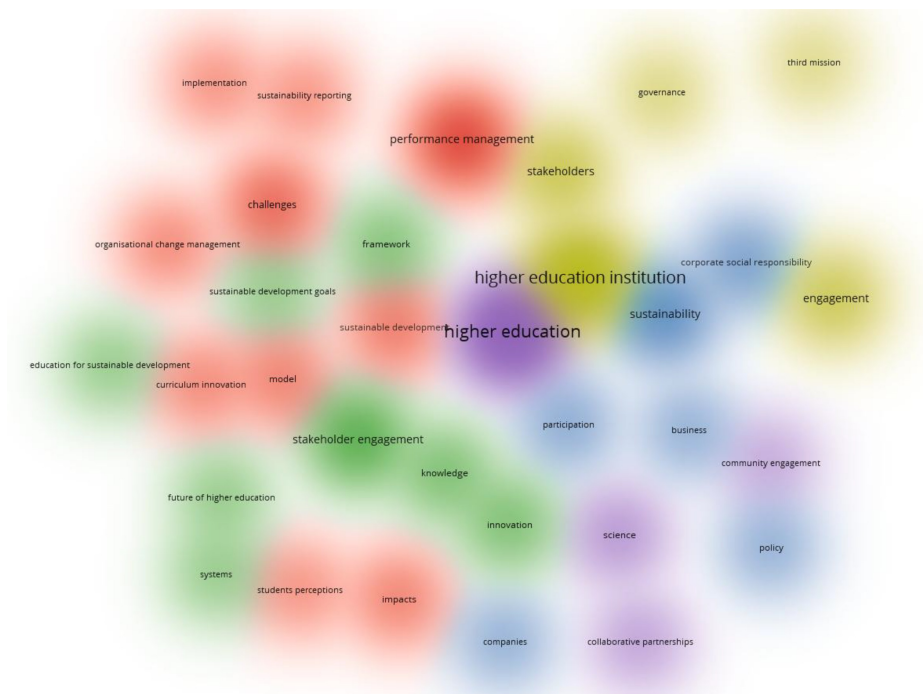
Source: Generated by VOSviewer



Source: Generated by VOSviewer

Figure 4. Co-occurrence network of words

the leaders of these projects (Audretsch and Link, 2019). This is a focus of concern since it is expected that all knowledge generated by HEIs associated with innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable development to be transferred to society (Guerrero and Urbano, 2012; Moraes *et al.*, 2021), aligning with the concept of the “third mission” (Corazza and Saluto, 2021). HEIs are tasked with contributing to sustainable development by disseminating knowledge to society, which is in line with the principles of USR. Monitoring these processes, including activity planning, execution and technology and innovation transfer,



Source: Generated by VOSviewer
Figure 5. Co-occurrence network of words highlighting the five clusters

becomes crucial to ensure transparency and enhance outcomes – this is where sustainability governance mechanisms play a significant role in the context of modern HEIs (Nicolo *et al.*, 2020).

The green cluster highlights concerns regarding the need to restructure higher education courses to adequately prepare future professionals to address the challenges of sustainable development, in special through USR (Vallaey *et al.*, 2022), and with students of HEIs concerns (Ayala-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2019). It is crucial to adopt a broader and more systemic perspective when addressing global issues, emphasizing interdisciplinary in professional training for sustainable development (Annan-Diab and Molinari, 2017).

The interconnection of the blue cluster with the other research clusters sheds light on two important aspects. First, it explores how HEIs can support companies in enhancing their corporate social responsibility efforts (Ahmad, 2012; Gallardo-Vázquez and Sanchez-Hernandez, 2014). Second, it examines how companies can assist HEIs in better understanding the training needs of new professionals in alignment with the requirements of various stakeholders (Audretsch and Link, 2019). The concept of corporate social responsibility in HEIs is also addressed in the literature. Garde-Sánchez *et al.* (2013) demonstrate the role of stakeholder engagement in encouraging HEIs to communicate information pertaining to corporate social responsibility, highlighting the significance of stakeholders in the context of USR.

The purple cluster includes keywords such as “higher education,” “science,” “collaborative partnerships” and “community engagements.” The interconnection between these words reinforces the notion that science should adopt a more collaborative approach, focusing on solving problems in local communities and society at large, as supported by studies conducted by [Latif \(2018\)](#), [Purcell et al. \(2019\)](#), [Santos et al. \(2020\)](#), [Vallaes et al. \(2022\)](#), among others. This aligns with the concept of USR, where higher education institutions encompass all their activities, including research, to foster collaborative partnerships for synergistic gains and improved outcomes while engaging with society to understand its needs better. This practice is in line with the concept of “Responsible Research and Innovation” advocated by [Grunwald \(2021\)](#) and [Wilford \(2019\)](#). [Shea et al. \(2017\)](#) emphasize the significance of collaborative partnerships between researchers and the community in disseminating research knowledge, while [Dentoni and Bitzer \(2015\)](#) highlight the role of academics in multi-stakeholder initiatives, contributing knowledge and connecting students with such initiatives through collaborative partnerships.

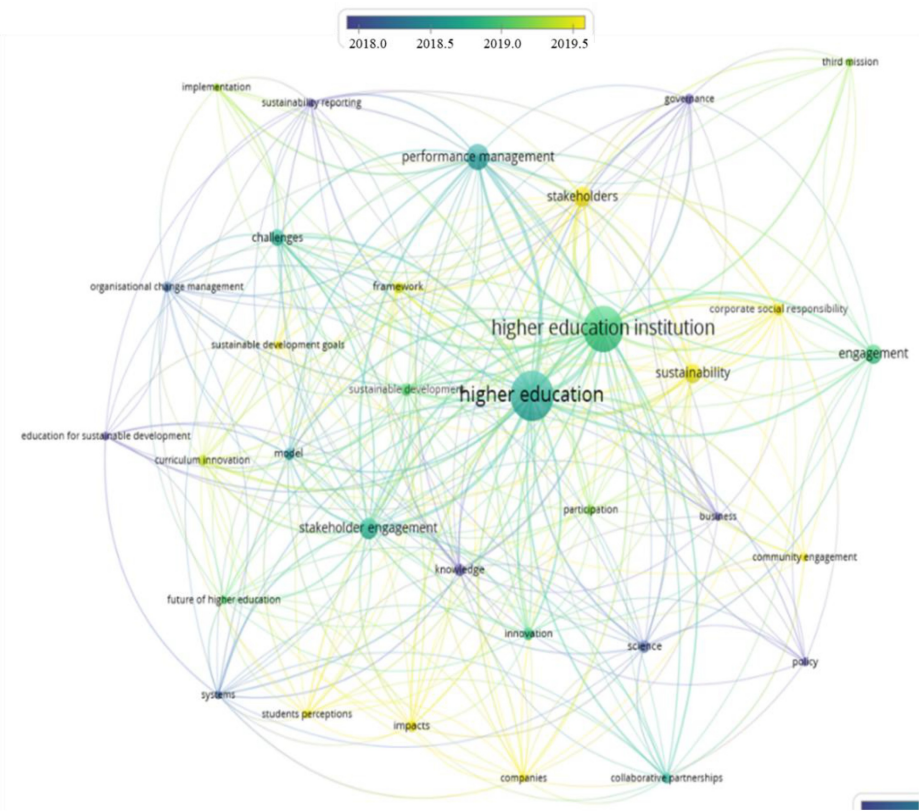
The central message associated with the red cluster is that the transformation process of HEIs toward engaging multiple stakeholders needs to be analyzed through the lens of organizational change theories. This process requires careful planning, effective communication, active participation (including understanding diverse perceptions and opinions) and clear indicators to monitor the performance and impact of these changes. It also entails transparent reporting of actions to all involved parties. Despite comprehensive planning and implementation, challenges are inevitable, and the lessons learned offer valuable opportunities for the evolution of the process. HEIs need to stay updated on the expectations related to USR ([Leal Filho et al., 2021b](#)). The proposition of models, frameworks and the sharing of experiences in the literature significantly contribute to this process (e.g. [Dzimińska et al., 2020](#); [Leal Filho et al., 2021a](#)).

In [Figure 6](#), the co-occurrence network illustrates the average year of publication for the terms. Taking this temporal perspective into account, the terms highlighted in light green and yellow represent ongoing debates in the field. Within our analysis, several key terms central to the study’s discussions warrant attention. These terms encompass both broader concepts, such as the SDGs, and more specific topics, such as the “third mission” of HEIs ([Corazza and Saluto, 2021](#)), curriculum innovation ([Annan-Diab and Molinari, 2017](#)), students’ perceptions ([Coelho and Menezes, 2021](#)), the future of higher education ([Decamps et al., 2021](#)) and people participation ([Vallaes et al., 2022](#)).

[Corazza and Saluto \(2021\)](#) argue that the term “third mission” refers to the societal contributions of HEIs, where they share the knowledge generated through education and research with the community. The authors highlight that studies in this field primarily focus on entrepreneurial activities undertaken by HEIs. Regarding students’ perception and stakeholder participation, [Correia et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasize the importance of HEIs considering the inputs of internal stakeholders when it comes to sustainability initiatives. They suggest further studies in this area to delve deeper into the topic.

3.2 Proposing guidelines to enhance stakeholder management in HEIs

The bibliometric study served to identify topics that are strongly related to stakeholder engagement and HEIs, thus highlighting areas where HEI managers need to enhance their expertise to better manage stakeholder relationships. Drawing on the bibliometric results (particularly [Figures 4–6](#)), the authors’ experience in terms of university background and management positions in HEIs, seven key areas were established to develop guidelines about. The content analysis technique based on the propositions of [Elo and Kyngäs \(2008\)](#)



Source: Generated by VOSviewer

Figure 6. Co-occurrence network of words showing the average year of publication of terms

was applied to establish the guidelines to support HEIs’ managers in enhancing stakeholder management in these seven areas (Figure 7).

Since academic literature was not enough to establish these guidelines, relevant references, including standards, corporate governance manuals and articles that had previously synthesized concepts from the literature were selected, for each key area. The research group conducted debates and formulated guidelines for each key area as presented in the next sections.

3.2.1 Guidelines for engagement and governance in HEIs. Based on ISO 10018:2020 (Guidance for people engagement) (ISO, 2020) and Brazilian Institute of Corporate Governance (2015), the following guidelines were developed:

- The HEI should establish a model that values transparency, ethics, equity and social responsibility, with stakeholder representatives serving on its university boards.
- The HEI should commit to providing stakeholders with relevant information beyond what is required by laws or regulations.
- The HEI should ensure fair and equal treatment of all stakeholders, be accountable for its actions and consistently act in a socially responsible manner.



Source: Authors' own work

Figure 7. Key areas for HEIs' managers to enhance stakeholder management

- When senior management demonstrates genuine commitment to sustainable development and fosters an organizational culture aligned with it, stakeholder engagement naturally follows.
- Well-defined and achievable aspirations that support strategic actions and decision-making will contribute to effective stakeholder engagement.
- All employees of the HEI, regardless of their role, play a crucial part in the success of sustainable actions. Therefore, providing effective training at all levels to bridge knowledge gaps in sustainability will enhance stakeholder engagement and yield better results.
- The HEI should regularly assess the level of stakeholder engagement in its activities and make necessary adjustments to enhance it.
- The HEI should provide stakeholders with information that promotes awareness, collective performance improvement and knowledge development, fostering stakeholder engagement.

3.2.2 *Guidelines for innovation and knowledge management in HEIs.* Based on ISO 56002:2019 (Innovation management system – Guidance) ([International Organization for Standardization, 2020](#)), the following guidelines were developed:

- HEIs should highly value diversity within their teams when engaging in activities related to process innovation, whether in research or initiatives aimed at continuous improvement of administrative or educational processes, as this enhances the outcomes.
- HEIs should consistently assess their infrastructure and competency gaps to foster innovation in their processes, research and other activities. They should provide the necessary structure and training to employees to overcome these barriers.
- HEIs should recognize that managing process innovation, research activities and educational processes requires effective knowledge management. Lessons learned, whether from successful experiences to be replicated or from failures to be understood and prevented, should be shared.
- Discussing associated risks is a healthy practice for HEIs when considering innovative ideas. Contrary to misconceptions, this does not create mistrust but increases the chances of success for the initiative.
- HEIs should communicate clearly to all employees that innovation is not always a linear and sequential process. Identifying opportunities, developing and validating concepts, and implementing solutions in any area may involve non-linear feedback and connections in both directions.
- HEIs should regularly review their innovative initiatives to ensure they align with the desired scope and expected results. If necessary, adjustments should be made to accommodate the context and interests of stakeholders.

3.2.3 *Guidelines for education for sustainable development in HEIs.* Based on [UNESCO \(2020\)](#), [Morin \(2010\)](#), [Kolmos et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Sigahi and Sznclwar \(2023\)](#), the following guidelines were developed:

- HEIs should integrate sustainability aspects at all levels, including curricula, interdisciplinary and interdepartmental projects, and institutional structure.
- HEIs should develop means and tools to assess the level of maturity regarding the integration of sustainability into their programs.
- HEIs should prioritize actions with the potential to bring about systemic transformations, considering the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability.
- It is essential for HEIs to promote an understanding of sustainable development through a complex systems approach, so that its importance and impacts are not simplistically assimilated through a reductionist viewpoint.
- HEIs should value and encourage multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary learning, as the challenges of sustainability require knowledge from all fields of study.

3.2.4 *Guidelines for responsible research, innovation and collaborative partnerships in HEIs.* Based on ISO 56003:2019 (Tools and methods for innovation partnership) ([International Organization for Standardization, 2019](#)), ISO 56002:2019 (Innovation management system – Guidance) ([International Organization for Standardization, 2020](#)), [Rampasso et al. \(2022\)](#), the following guidelines were developed:

- HEIs should consistently evaluate whether their research contributes to sustainable development, aligns with the 17 SDGs, and fosters the advancement of local communities.
- HEIs should establish mechanisms to assess potential research partners and how they can complement their own deficiencies, be it in terms of infrastructure, knowledge or other aspects. These partnerships can involve other HEIs, companies, individuals, local communities, third-sector organizations, among others.
- When establishing a research partnership, it is crucial for HEIs to engage in discussions about the partnership's scope and key factors that may influence the achievement of desired outcomes.
- HEIs should regularly review their partnerships to ensure a shared understanding among all members regarding the partnership's objectives, individual roles and assigned responsibilities. Developing a SWOT matrix, in this case, can facilitate productive discussions aimed at continuous improvement.

3.2.5 *Guidelines for organizational change management in HEIs.* Based on [Silva et al. \(2019\)](#) and ISO/TS 10020:2022 (Organizational change management – Processes) ([International Organization for Standardization, 2022](#)), the following guidelines were developed:

- When implementing organizational change, HEIs should prioritize clear communication among all employees, ensuring that the objectives of the process are clearly articulated.
- It is essential to create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Recognizing and addressing concerns such as fear of the unknown, insecurities, anxiety, stress and past negative experiences is crucial during organizational change, and open discussions should be encouraged.
- HEI management should actively participate in the change process, engaging with employees to ensure a shared understanding of the benefits of the organizational change and how it will be implemented. This proactive approach helps foster trust and confidence among all stakeholders.

3.2.6 *Guidelines for social responsibility in HEIs.* Based on ISO 26000:2010 (Guidance on social responsibility) ([ISO, 2010](#)), the following guidelines were developed:

- All organizations have a responsibility to contribute to sustainable development in diverse ways. Therefore, HEIs should actively pursue this purpose and motivate partner organizations, including businesses, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, to embrace sustainability practices.
- Sustainable actions should be integrated into the core strategies and management systems of organizations, rather than being isolated initiatives. This applies to HEIs, businesses, government agencies and others. Hence, HEIs should incorporate sustainable practices into their educational and management systems, while also encouraging partner organizations to do the same.
- Respect for the rule of law, human rights, international norms and the interests of stakeholders are essential and indisputable. HEIs should embody and promote these principles, ensuring that partner organizations also adhere to them.

- It is crucial for HEIs to strengthen their communication mechanisms to effectively identify the interests and expectations of stakeholders, society and the environment at various touchpoints.
- Key aspects of social responsibility encompass human rights, labor practices, environmental impact, fair operational practices, consumer concerns and community engagement and development. While some aspects may be more specific to the business sector and others broader in scope, it is the responsibility of HEIs to educate ethical professionals aligned with the principles of sustainable development. Furthermore, HEIs should ensure that their own actions and those of their partner organizations consistently align with these social responsibility themes.
- Through continuous improvement of these actions, it is anticipated that HEIs will cultivate a culture of social responsibility.

3.2.7 Guidelines for performance management and sustainability reporting in HEIs. Based on Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 101, and 102 (GRI, 2018), and ISO 26000:2010 (Guidance on social responsibility) (ISO, 2010), the following guidelines were developed:

- HEIs should incorporate key economic, environmental and social themes into their long-term strategies to gain competitive advantages and drive greater impact on sustainable development using qualitative and quantitative value drivers based on the item 2.2.9 of GRI 102.
- It is important to regularly assess HEIs' performance in relation to sustainable development and stakeholder engagement, aiming to ensure the effective implementation of initiatives and identify areas for improvement (based on the item 2.2.4 of GRI 102). These critical assessments provide valuable insights that can inform adjustments to action plans (based on the item 2.2.5 of GRI 102).
- HEIs should establish a comprehensive and proactive process to identify and address the social, environmental and economic impacts of their decisions, with the goal of mitigating and avoiding adverse effects. This process is commonly referred to as due diligence (ISO, 2010).
- HEIs are expected to provide high quality information in their sustainability reports, ensuring transparency and accountability.

When it comes to the quality of information contained in sustainability reports developed by HEIs, it is fundamental that they have the following characteristics (GRI, 2018):

- Accuracy: Ensuring that stakeholders receive the necessary information to accurately assess the performance of HEIs.
- Balance: Reflecting both positive and negative aspects of HEIs' performance to enable a well-rounded evaluation of their overall achievements.
- Clarity: Presenting information in a clear and accessible manner to all stakeholders, avoiding technical jargon and complexity.
- Comparability: Facilitating analysis and comparison with other organizations.
- Reliability: Demonstrating an accurate representation of HEIs' day-to-day operations.
- Timeliness: Providing the reports in a timely manner, allowing stakeholders to make well-informed decisions.

4. Conclusion

HEIs are increasingly recognizing the importance and making efforts to enhance their relationships with various stakeholders in society. This has led to a growing interest in stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management studies. It is crucial to make conceptual and practical advancements in how HEI managers can effectively promote better practices in engaging with stakeholders. In line with this objective, this study aimed to identify key areas and provide guidelines for each of them, which can be used by managers to improve stakeholder management.

The bibliometric study offered a comprehensive overview of research on stakeholder engagement and management within the context of HEIs. It identified prominent journals, authors, works and countries, providing condensed information that can be valuable for future researchers seeking a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In addition, the bibliometric analysis identified five thematic clusters, highlighting important research topics such as the third mission of HEIs, sustainability governance, partnerships with companies, debates on the future of education and organizational change processes, among others.

Based on the insights from the bibliometric analysis, seven key areas were identified, and specific guidelines were proposed to enhance stakeholder management practices in HEIs. These guidelines were developed through discussions among the research group and draw upon the researchers' own experiences as HEI managers.

From a theoretical standpoint, the increasing recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement reflects a paradigm shift in understanding sustainability and social responsibility in HEIs. This signifies an evolution in research and highlights the need for conceptual advancement. By identifying key areas and proposing specific guidelines, the study contributes to the development of theories and models that can guide HEI managers in improving their interaction practices with stakeholders. This theoretical foundation provides a structured and comprehensive framework for addressing stakeholder management.

On a practical level, the proposed guidelines have practical implications for HEI managers. These guidelines offer practical insights and recommendations for enhancing stakeholder management in HEIs. The guidelines proposed enable HEIs to restructure their management systems to improve them. Managers can utilize them to promote effective dialogue, increased stakeholder engagement and collaborative partnerships. It is worth to highlight that although the guidelines presented are centered on stakeholders, they require structural changes in several areas of HEIs, regarding management, education and research. In addition, it is possible to verify the interconnection between different areas of the guidelines, showing the need of an integrated management for a successful implementation of them. This broad focus and interconnection evidence the relevance of stakeholder management discussion in the context of HEIs. Regarding the information obtained from the bibliometric study, it serves as a valuable resource for HEIs' managers, providing references and insights for implementing more effective stakeholder management practices.

The identification of thematic clusters through the bibliometric analysis further contributes to practical implications. These clusters highlight key research areas and ongoing debates, enabling HEIs' managers to identify relevant and emerging topics in sustainability and social responsibility. By aligning their actions with these areas, managers can prioritize actions that have the potential to bring about systemic transformations within their institutions. Moreover, the practical implications are strengthened by the researchers' experience as HEIs' managers. The insights and practical perspective provide valuable context for implementing the proposed guidelines in real-world HEIs settings. For regulators and standard setters, the guidelines presented indicates main areas of concern that should be focused on policies and sectorial standards to stimulate HEIs to work in the same direction.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study and identify opportunities for future research. One limitation is the reliance on bibliometric analysis, which may not capture all relevant research publications and may be subject to biases in the selection of journals, keywords or authors. Future studies could employ additional methodologies, such as qualitative interviews or case studies, to gain a deeper understanding of the practical challenges and opportunities faced by HEIs' managers in stakeholder engagement and management. In addition, the proposed guidelines in the study serve as a starting point, but further empirical research is needed to assess their effectiveness and applicability in different HEI contexts. Future studies could evaluate the implementation of these guidelines in various HEIs and measure their impact on stakeholder engagement outcomes. Furthermore, the study mainly focuses on the perspectives of HEI managers, and there is an opportunity to include the viewpoints of other stakeholders, such as students, faculty members and community members. Understanding their expectations, needs and concerns regarding stakeholder engagement can provide a more holistic understanding of effective practices and opportunities for improvement.

In conclusion, the study's theoretical implications underscore the importance of conceptual advancement, while the practical implications offer actionable recommendations for HEIs' managers to enhance stakeholder engagement and management. By considering both the theoretical and practical aspects, HEIs can make meaningful progress toward stakeholder management and sustainability in their institutions.

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