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CSR as a Social Investment Chain: Building Digital Capabilities and Employability through School-Based Institutional Practice

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Abstract

This study examines how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) functions as a social investment chain to develop digital capabilities and enhance employability through institutional practices within secondary schools. Building on the evolving perspective of CSR-from a moral obligation to a strategy for creating shared value-this research employs a qualitative case study approach at SMK Forward Nusantara Depok, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving company representatives, school leaders, teachers, and students. The findings reveal that CSR extends beyond merely providing resources; it operates as a multi-tiered process encompassing investment in digital access, institutional capacity building, and the cultivation of student employability. Digital facilities are transformed into sustainable learning practices through teacher training, curriculum integration, and school governance, enabling students to produce digital projects, build portfolios, and foster independent learning. These practices exemplify social investment mechanisms at the micro level that cultivate future-oriented capabilities. This study contributes to the CSR and welfare literature by conceptualizing CSR as a social investment chain grounded in institutional practices and offers practical implications for designing CSR programs focused on educational capacity building.

Kata Kunci:
Corporate social responsibility, Kualitas pendidikan kejuruan, Kolaborasi industri-pendidikan

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) berfungsi sebagai rantai investasi sosial dalam pengembangan kapabilitas digital dan peningkatan daya kerja (employability) melalui praktik-praktik institusional di tingkat sekolah menengah kejuruan. Berangkat dari perkembangan perspektif CSR, dari kewajiban moral menuju strategi penciptaan nilai bersama (creating shared value), penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif yang berlokasi di SMK Forward Nusantara Depok, Indonesia. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, serta analisis dokumen yang melibatkan perwakilan perusahaan, pimpinan sekolah, guru, dan peserta didik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa CSR tidak hanya berperan sebagai mekanisme penyediaan sumber daya, tetapi juga beroperasi sebagai proses berlapis yang mencakup investasi pada akses digital, penguatan kapasitas institusional sekolah, serta pembentukan daya kerja peserta didik.

Fasilitas digital yang disediakan melalui program CSR ditransformasikan menjadi praktik pembelajaran berkelanjutan melalui pelatihan guru, integrasi kurikulum, dan penguatan tata kelola sekolah. Proses ini memungkinkan peserta didik untuk menghasilkan proyek digital, membangun portofolio keterampilan, serta mengembangkan pembelajaran mandiri yang berorientasi pada masa depan. Praktik-praktik tersebut mencerminkan mekanisme investasi sosial pada level mikro yang berkontribusi pada penguatan kapabilitas generasi muda. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada literatur CSR dan kesejahteraan dengan mengonseptualisasikan CSR sebagai rantai investasi sosial yang berakar pada praktik institusional, sekaligus menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi perancangan program CSR yang berfokus pada penguatan kapasitas pendidikan.

INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment through corporate social responsibility (CSR)—long regarded as an ethical and sustainable strategy for aligning business objectives with social interests—is exemplified in CSR initiatives targeting the education sector. Within the framework of creating shared value, CSR is understood as an effort to integrate social value into the generation of long-term economic value, rather than serving as mere symbolic philanthropy (Menghwar & Daood, 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Premananto & Sanwasi, 2023). Normatively, education is positioned as the foundation of human development and a key driver of inclusive growth on the global agenda (United Nations, 2023). However, when this concept is applied to the context of secondary education in Indonesia, particularly vocational schools, tensions emerge between the strategic expectations of CSR and the real limitations in infrastructure, curriculum, and digital competence. At this juncture, CSR transcends theoretical discourse on sustainability and is tested through concrete practices that directly address challenges related to institutional capacity and the preparedness of the younger generation to engage with the digital workforce.

An unresolved question in the literature concerns how corporate social responsibility (CSR) functions at the micro level as a mechanism for sustainable educational capacity building. Some studies position CSR as a tool for community empowerment and welfare improvement, emphasizing participation and direct economic impact (Agustina et al., 2025; Devi & Kumalasari, 2024; Nurjanah & Nurnisya, 2019). In contrast, others view CSR in education as limited to facility support and technical training, without recognizing it as a long-term investment (Adyati & Ahmad, 2025; Fitriadi, 2020). Macro-level studies tend to assess CSR in terms of reputation and normative contributions to development (Abebe Mamo et al., 2024). Although the potential of CSR to bridge the education gap is acknowledged (Camilleri, 2018), empirical research examining how CSR translates into

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learning practices and workforce capabilities within specific educational institutions remains scarce (Huffman, 2003). This gap suggests that CSR is more often perceived as an aid program rather than a systematic social investment strategy.

Based on this gap, this study aims to examine in depth the corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of PT Century Distribution Systems Indonesia in the context of improving the quality of education at SMK Forward Nusantara Depok. The focus is to reveal how CSR is constructed as a series of social investments, including providing digital access, strengthening the institutional capacity of schools, and enhancing student employability. This context is particularly relevant, given that the distribution and logistics sector heavily depends on information technology and digital skills, making collaboration between companies and schools strategically important to bridge the needs of industry and education (Cohen et al., 2025; Manjunadh & Manoj, 2024). Using a micro- and contextual approach, this study not only examines what is provided through CSR but also how these interventions function in the daily practices of schools to shape students' learning processes and future orientation.

This study builds on the argument that corporate social responsibility (CSR), when designed in a participatory and sustainability-oriented manner, can function as a form of social investment that generates long-term capabilities through local educational institutions. Within the social investment framework, education and skills are viewed as investments in the future aimed at preventing social risks such as unemployment and exclusion (Hemerijck, 2018; Morel et al., 2011). CSR extends beyond moral responsibility or technical assistance to form a chain of social investment that links access to resources, institutional capacity, and employability-focused outcomes. This perspective positions schools as the primary venues for transforming resources into capabilities, while framing CSR as a non-state welfare mechanism that enriches the understanding of corporations' roles within the contemporary welfare mix.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility as a Social Investment

The development of CSR studies over the past decade has demonstrated a shift from a philanthropic approach to a strategic orientation that integrates CSR as a component of long-term social investment. The concept of creating shared value highlights that social and economic value can be generated simultaneously through core business strategies (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Several recent studies situate CSR within a broader sustainability framework, where companies are expected to allocate resources toward building productive social capacity rather than merely fulfilling ethical or reputational obligations (Clougherty

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et al., 2017; Moncada et al., 2016). Within this framework, CSR is increasingly regarded as an investment mechanism aimed at structural change and long-term impact for beneficiary communities.

Empirical literature indicates that effective corporate social responsibility (CSR) is characterized by a focus on capacity building and sustainable empowerment. Studies on CSR practices in developing countries demonstrate how corporate interventions increasingly complement the state's limitations in providing welfare, positioning CSR as a component of the contemporary welfare mix (Hemerijck, 2018). Additionally, research shows that CSR embedded within an organization's core strategy and aligned with sustainability goals tends to generate more consistent and integrated social impacts than ad hoc or symbolic programs (Farid & Wati, 2024; Li et al., 2023). Recent studies further confirm that a shared value-based CSR orientation encourages companies to design long-term, transformative interventions (Menghwar & Daood, 2021). This evidence supports interpreting CSR as a social investment operating through a series of institutional processes, rather than as a discrete activity separate from the dynamics of social development.

Digital Capabilities and Employability

Recent literature identifies digital capabilities as the fundamental basis for individuals' readiness to navigate a digitized job market. Studies on 21st-century skills characterize digital competence as encompassing technology use, problem-solving, collaboration, and continuous learning (van Laar et al., 2017). A recent systematic review confirms that digital skills have become a cross-sector prerequisite, shaping how individuals engage in both work and social life (Mendoza-Chan & Pee, 2024). In this context, digital capabilities are no longer viewed as supplementary attributes but as essential capital that determines an individual's position within the modern employment landscape.

The relationship between digital capabilities and employability is increasingly evident in empirical research. Studies show that digital competencies significantly contribute to employability dimensions such as adaptability, productivity, and readiness to face technological change (Đorđević et al., 2025). Similar findings are reported by Zuñiga-Collazos et al. (2025), who demonstrate that individuals with strong digital competencies tend to have better job opportunities and greater career mobility. However, several studies also emphasize that these capabilities do not develop automatically from mere access to technology but rather from structured learning experiences and repeated practice (Caroline et al., 2025). This perspective positions digital capabilities as an analytical bridge between educational interventions and long-term employability goals.

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School-Based Institutional Practices

Studies on digital transformation in education emphasize that technology becomes meaningful only when embedded within school institutional practices. The integration of technology is significantly influenced by the organization of the school curriculum, teacher roles, and internal policies (Oliver & Townsend, 2013). Research indicates that effective digital transformation requires institutional leadership and clear strategies, rather than merely providing devices (Zizikova et al., 2023). This perspective shifts the focus from viewing technology as a mere artifact to understanding schools as social arenas where technology is translated into pedagogical routines and organizational culture.

Recent empirical studies confirm that school-based institutional practices are crucial in transforming resources into student capabilities. Schliro (2024) demonstrates that teachers' digital competencies and their approach to designing learning experiences significantly influence the quality of student learning. Similarly, research on organizational digital transformation highlights that sustainable change occurs when technology is integrated alongside modifications in institutional processes and capabilities (Nagel & Amdam, 2025). These findings suggest that schools serve as the primary conversion mechanism, where various interventions—including corporate social responsibility (CSR)—can be institutionalized into stable learning practices focused on capability development and work readiness.

METHODS

This study examines the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by PT Century Distribution Systems Indonesia at SMK Forward Nusantara Depok, which serves as the unit of analysis. The context of an urban-peripheral school with limited digital infrastructure offers a relevant empirical setting to explore how CSR interventions are translated into learning practices and student capacity building. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, this research enables an in-depth exploration of processes, meanings, and social dynamics within a single context, rather than aiming for statistical generalization (Neuman, 2013). This approach was selected because the phenomenon of educational CSR involves interactions among actors, institutional practices, and contextual changes that cannot be reduced to isolated variables. Therefore, the qualitative case study design provides an appropriate framework for understanding how CSR functions as a social practice to enhance the quality of education at the micro level.

Data sources included both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through purposive sampling of eight key informants: two company representatives, one school principal, and five beneficiary students, to ensure depth and relevance of information. Secondary data were drawn from CSR reports,

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school curricula, and infrastructure records. Data collection involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews; three days of non-participant observation in classrooms and computer labs; and document analysis. This combination of techniques allowed the researchers to capture the perspectives of stakeholders, actual practices in the field, and written evidence in an integrated manner (Hennink et al., 2020). This multi-source approach was designed to enrich understanding of the program's motivations, implementation process, and changes experienced by the institution and students.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

No.	Informant Code	Category	Gender	Age	Interview Duration
1.	R1	CSR Program Director (PT. Century Distribution Systems Indonesia)	Female	41	60 minutes
2.	R2	CSR Program Officer (PT. Century Distribution Systems Indonesia)	Female	35	55 minutes
3.	R3	School Principal (SMK Forward Nusantara Depok)	Male	46	70 minutes
4.	R4	Vocational Student (ICT Program, Grade 11)	Male	16	45 minutes
5.	R5	Vocational Student (ICT Program, Grade 12)	Female	17	40 minutes
6.	R6	Vocational Student (ICT Program, Grade 11)	Female	16	50 minutes
7.	R7	Vocational Student (ICT Program, Grade 12)	Male	17	45 minutes

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the stages of transcription, familiarization, initial coding, searching for and reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes to produce a coherent narrative of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure validity, this study employed source triangulation, member checking, and the principle of data saturation as the basis for concluding data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strategy ensures that the researcher's interpretation accurately reflects the informants' experiences and is supported by cross-source consistency. With this analytical framework and validity procedures, the methodology is designed to produce credible, transparent, and scientifically rigorous findings that explain how CSR operates as a social investment practice at the institutional level.

RESULTS

Providing Access in Social CSR Investment: Resources Today, Capabilities for Tomorrow

Investment in digital access served as the foundational element of PT Century Distribution Systems Indonesia's social investment strategy through its CSR program at SMK Forward Nusantara Depok. Data indicate that prior to the CSR initiative, technology access at the school was severely limited, with only six outdated computers that frequently malfunctioned. This was confirmed by company representatives R1 and R2, who noted that the scarcity and unreliability of these computers restricted students' hands-on practice. Classroom observations further corroborated this, revealing that practical sessions were often disrupted by technical issues and unstable internet connectivity. Following the CSR intervention, the school received 19 laptops, high-speed internet, and a printer, all of which are now regularly used in classes. As student R4 explained, "Now we can directly open tutorials because the internet is fast." These changes highlight the CSR program's role as a provider of access that unlocks learning opportunities, while underscoring the need for institutional capacity to effectively transform this access into sustained outcomes.

This investment in access is also reflected in changes in facility usage during students' daily learning activities. Observations revealed that nearly all students can now use laptops simultaneously during graphic design and networking practice sessions. School principal R3 emphasized, "Now all students can practice directly in class." Beyond class hours, students continue to utilize the facilities, with R5 noting, "After school, we still use laptops to complete assignments." Attendance records indicate more equitable participation in practical activities compared to pre-program levels. Moreover, teachers have begun incorporating online reference searches into class routines. These data demonstrate that access is not only available but actively integrated into students' learning processes. This expanded utilization represents a foundational step that requires strengthened institutional capacity to manage it effectively.

Expanded digital access through corporate social responsibility (CSR) serves as the primary entry point in the social investment chain. Evidence from statements by R1, R3, and R5, as well as observational data, illustrates a clear shift from limited devices and connections to readily available facilities integrated into daily learning. This access enables students to engage in hands-on practice, source online materials, and develop digital projects at school. Essentially, it functions as an investment input that creates initial opportunities for capacity development. However, realizing meaningful change requires institutional mechanisms to manage and transform this access, which becomes the focus of subsequent investments in institutional capacity building.

Investment in Institutional Capacity through CSR: Maximizing Returns on Social Investments

Investment in institutional capacity is a crucial mechanism for transforming digital access into structured learning practices. Data show that teachers participated in training on learning management systems (LMS) and educational software. As School principal R3 explained, "We were trained so that we could guide students in using the software and integrating it into the curriculum," while R7 added that students could immediately practice in class. Observations revealed teachers providing step-by-step guidance on application use during lessons, and school activity records documented internal sessions for sharing device usage. This evidence demonstrates that resources were actively utilized and supported by efforts to enhance the capabilities of those managing them. Thus, teacher capacity and pedagogical practices serve as a bridge between available access and meaningful transformations in the learning process.

This institutional capacity building is also evident in the organization of technology-based learning activities and classroom interactions. Observations revealed students working individually and in groups on laptops to develop digital projects. Student R6 noted, "Teachers immediately check our work on the screen." Lesson plans and assignment documents reflect project-based tasks as a routine element of learning, while class notes indicate that practice sessions now constitute a major component in several subjects. These records demonstrate how technology is embedded in the daily learning structure rather than treated as an add-on. Thus, institutional capacity is reflected in the ability to integrate digital access into sustainable pedagogical routines.

Beyond teaching practices, institutional capacity is also demonstrated through the management of digital facilities at the school level. School principal R3 stated, "We create a schedule so that all classes have a turn," while teacher described the laptop borrowing system, which requires signatures. Observations revealed dedicated storage spaces and device usage logs, with R6 reporting that lessons now proceed more smoothly due to the ready availability of devices. School administrative records further detail laboratory usage schedules. This evidence highlights arrangements that promote the sustainability of digital access. Overall, institutional capacity functions as a conversion mechanism that facilitates access to support learning practices, thereby creating opportunities for student outcomes oriented toward employability.

Future-Oriented Returns on CSR: Reducing Unemployment and Dependency

Investment in student employability is evident in the emergence of digital outputs resulting directly from access-based learning practices and institutional capacity. Data reveal that students produce various digital works, such as simple websites and graphic designs. As student R4 stated, "I made a website for an assignment," while R5 added, "We designed posters using Photoshop." Observations documented editing activities, basic coding, and project presentations in class, with school principal R3 noting that assignments now take the form of digital projects rather than traditional writing. This evidence demonstrates that the learning process yields tangible outputs that can be compiled as concrete evidence of

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skills. Students' digital works thus serve as an early indicator of skills relevant to the workforce.

Employability is also demonstrated through students' engagement with digital learning activities beyond formal classes. For example, R6 reported, "I participated in a design webinar," and R7 shared, "I took an online course on a platform." Observations revealed students accessing online tutorials during free time at school, with screenshots documenting completed modules and earned certificates. These data capture student-led participation in independent digital learning that extends beyond curriculum requirements. Such activities illustrate that students not only complete class assignments but also develop additional skills autonomously. This engagement further highlights the role of the learning process in enhancing work readiness.

The focus on employability becomes increasingly evident through portfolio development and job preparation simulations in the final year. Student R5 explained, "We were asked to collect projects for our portfolios," while school principal R3 described guiding students in curating their best work. Observations included simulations of portfolio presentations before teachers, and school documents outlined digital skill requirements for internship preparation. This evidence demonstrates that learning outcomes are systematically organized to support post-graduation application. In essence, employability emerges as a proximal outcome of access and capacity building, thereby completing the social investment chain from inputs to future welfare-oriented results.

DISCUSSION

PT Century Distribution Systems Indonesia's CSR program operates within the framework of creating shared value by identifying the genuine needs of schools and addressing them through the provision of laptops, printers, and internet access. This approach enhances access and digital competence, which are subsequently integrated into daily learning activities. The adoption of technology supports a shift toward more student-centered learning models and the development of soft skills through collaborative projects and activities. This transformation results in various digital outputs and portfolio practices that improve students' career readiness. Overall, this process demonstrates that CSR extends beyond merely providing facilities, representing a tiered progression from needs assessment and access to learning and strategic contributions that strengthen educational capacity and human resources (see Figure 1).

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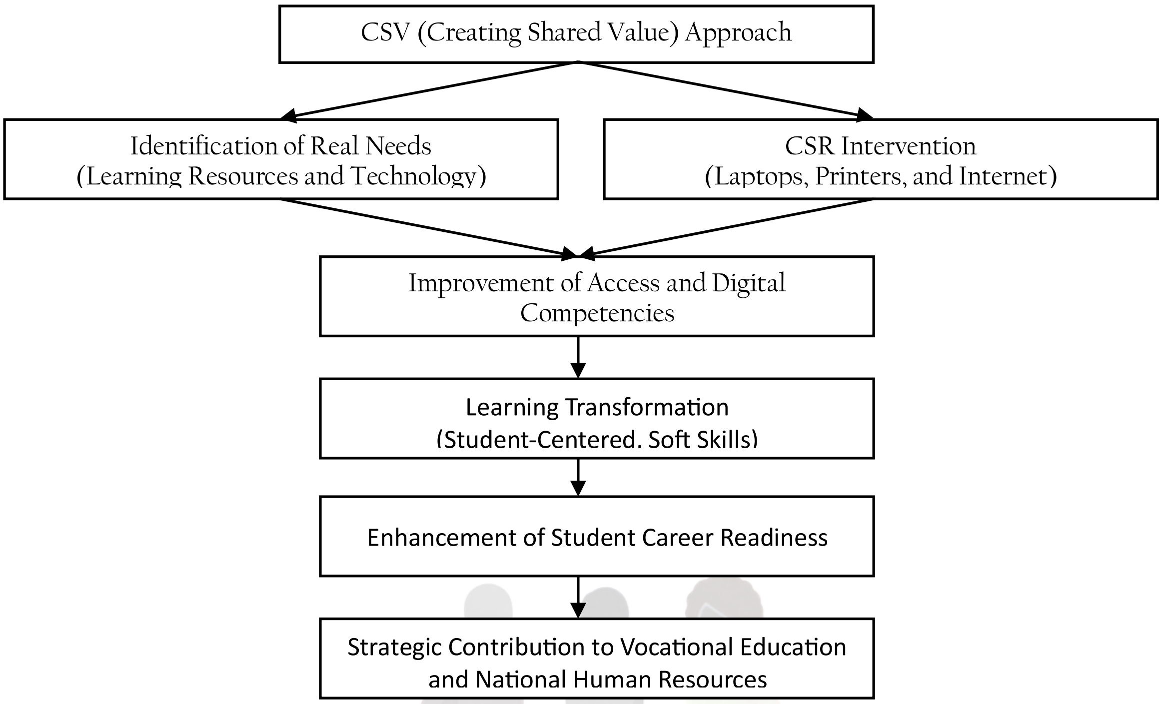

Figure 1: Strategic Implications of PT. Century Distribution Systems Indonesia's CSR Program
Source: Primary Research Data, Processed by the Researcher (2025)

Orientation toward work readiness through social investment at the micro level transforms resource provision into future-oriented welfare. Providing digital access alongside strengthened learning practices signifies a shift from compensatory philanthropy to a capacity-building process that enables young people to realize their productive potential. This approach aligns with the concept of creating shared value, where corporate involvement generates both social and economic benefits (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Simultaneously, the progression from access to institutional capacity and employability embodies the core principles of the social investment approach, which positions education and skills as preventive strategies against future social risks (Hemerijck, 2018; Morel et al., 2011). Teacher involvement and enhanced school governance also resonate with developmental social work and community development perspectives that prioritize empowerment and local institutional strengthening (Ife, 2013; Midgley, 1999). Thus, CSR emerges as a relational and developmental welfare practice embedded in local institutions, rather than a residual form of corporate charity.

These practices demonstrate how corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be understood as a community development process that operates through habituation, relationships, and local capacity building. Within the community development tradition, change emerges not solely from technical interventions but as praxis that fosters new ways of learning, interacting, and seizing opportunities (Freire, 2000; Ife, 2013; Febriyanti et al., 2023). When local actors engage in resource management and the structuring of learning processes, the outcomes

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extend beyond skill acquisition to cultivate adaptive dispositions characteristic of capacity building in social development (Midgley, 2014). Simultaneously, routines that promote independence, project engagement, and future orientation illustrate how individuals are gradually shaped through institutional practices—a dynamic frequently highlighted in critical analyses of power relations in community development (Ledwith, 2011). Therefore, CSR serves as a praxis arena within community development, subtly nurturing the capabilities and future orientation of the school community.

CSR practices, understood as processes of capacity building, relationship formation, and future orientation within the school community, reveal meanings that go beyond conventional frameworks of empowerment, technical assistance, and normative assessments found in the literature. While some studies emphasize participation and direct economic impacts (Agustina et al., 2025; Devi & Kumalasari, 2024), others treat facility provision and training as ends in themselves (Adyati & Ahmad, 2025; Fitriadi, 2020), and some remain limited to reputation evaluations and macro-level frameworks (Abebe Mamo et al., 2024). The connection between access, institutional capacity, and productive dispositions introduces a novel analytical dimension. In this context, CSR transcends sectoral interventions or mere support, emerging as a series of practices that progressively shape individuals' capabilities and orientations through everyday institutional life. This perspective shifts scholarly focus from what is provided to how these practices cultivate previously unexamined future possibilities.

Expanding the CSR approach into a strategic framework that links interventions to social capacity building and long-term welfare is essential. Recent international literature reviews indicate that, in community development contexts, CSR must evolve beyond moral responsibility or temporary aid programs to integrate with broader, inclusive social development objectives, including community welfare within sustainable corporate responsibility (Simbai et al., 2024). Similarly, studies on CSR and inclusive growth emphasize the need for structured, measurable strategies to reduce inequality and promote sustainable economic and social development (Chipriyanov et al., 2024). Consequently, the future direction of CSR involves developing systematic, sustainable models that embed CSR into social empowerment and community capacity-building initiatives as integral components of transformative welfare development.

CONCLUSION

The orientation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)-traditionally regarded as a moral obligation for companies to enhance community welfare-is reinterpreted in this study. The findings reveal that PT Century Distribution Systems Indonesia's CSR functions as a structured social investment

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chain, connecting the provision of digital access, the strengthening of school institutional capacity, and the development of student employability. Rather than stopping at facility provision, this intervention catalyzes changes in learning practices, increases student participation in digital activities, and produces tangible outcomes such as work-oriented projects and portfolios. This progression demonstrates that welfare arises not merely from resource distribution but through relational practices that progressively build young people's capabilities and future orientation. Therefore, CSR in this context is not residual philanthropy but a micro-level social investment mechanism that enhances educational capacity and promotes long-term welfare.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of PT Century Distribution Systems Indonesia's CSR program on improving educational quality at SMK Forward Nusantara Depok. This method enables researchers to capture the dynamics of daily practices, inter-actor relationships, and the meanings behind changes in student access, learning, and outcomes, thereby revealing key findings in a contextual and comprehensive manner. However, the study is limited to a single case and does not examine the long-term effects on graduates' work transitions or social mobility; therefore, the findings should be generalized with caution. Future research is recommended to adopt cross-location comparative designs, incorporate longitudinal alumni tracking, and integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the sustainability and scalability of CSR as a social investment in broader welfare contexts.

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