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An Investigation of Social Entrepreneurship Education Programmes in the UK

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Existing research demonstrates a progression in educational programmes focusing on generating social value, however social entrepreneurship education (SEE) still remains in its infancy. This study aims to evaluate SEE within the UK and investigate whether SEE prepares individuals to initiate a new social venture. This will be achieved through a content analysis of UK SEE programmes which are available to social entrepreneurs during the formation stage of a social enterprise and conducting semi-structured interviews with social entrepreneurs who have established a social enterprise in the UK. This study will contribute to existing research and provide SEE educators with evidence of the optimal pedagogical methods and curriculum content to equip future social entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills and experience required to launch a social enterprise.

Track: Entrepreneurship Track

Word Count: 1998

1. Introduction

Social enterprise (SE) is a concept that is recognised as an expanding global phenomenon (Kerlin, 2009). Since the concept was introduced by Drayton in the 1970s, social entrepreneurship has become an area of increasing interest (Sen, 2007; Newbert, 2014; Douglas, 2015; Cinar, 2019; Addae, 2021; Weaver, 2021; Polonyová and Pongrácz, 2022). As acknowledged by Kickul et al (2021) the past 20 years has seen the academic field of social entrepreneurship grow from a “fragmented body of literature” (Newbert, 2014) to an established discipline. Social entrepreneurship has been considered as the solution to addressing social problems such as homelessness, poverty, unemployment, climate change and is recognised for its ability to promote positive social change in the community (Capella-Peris et al., 2020; Weaver, 2021; Manjon et al., 2022). Recent literature has also recognized social entrepreneurship as a means for tackling issues both created and worsened by the COVID 19 pandemic (Weaver, 2020). This has resulted in social entrepreneurship education (SEE) becoming a valuable area of research (Choi and Majumdar, 2014; Kannampuzha and Hockerts, 2019; Halsall, Oberoi and Snowden, 2021; Mir Shahid and Alarifi, 2021; Weaver, 2021). SEE is designed to educate students on how to develop socially entrepreneurial behaviours to become future leaders who create social impact (García-González and Ramírez-Montoya, 2021; Kwong *et al.*, 2022). There is an evident increase in demand due to student interest for SEE and a desire for a better understanding of what is a social entrepreneur (Kirby and Ibrahim, 2011; Worsham, 2012). Accordingly, SEE programmes have become an important addition in business schools on a global scale, which aid the development of the necessary competencies and skills required to launch and manage social enterprises and sustainable ventures (Brock and Kim, 2011; Choi and Majumdar, 2014; Douglas, 2015; Kickul et al., 2018; Kummitha and Kummitha, 2021). Moreover, several studies highlight the influence of SEE on students’ social entrepreneurial intention and orientation to consider establishing a social enterprise as a career option (Miller et al., 2012; Hockerts, 2018; Naveed et al., 2021).

Within the UK, there has been evident progression within education and government policy that has directly promoted social entrepreneurship. Dobeles (2016) examines the UK political climate and describes this as one that supports the development of social enterprises. There are several educational initiatives available to new entrepreneurs who are starting a social enterprise in the UK for example, The School of Social Entrepreneurs, Social Enterprise Academy Scotland, Wales Co-operative Centre: Social Enterprise Support Programme, UnLtd, Social Enterprise UK, On Purpose and EY Foundation (British Council, 2022). Torkington’s (2019) evaluation finds that over 100 UK universities engaged in running programmes to support social entrepreneurship.

However, despite this progression in educational programmes focusing on generating social value, SEE still remains in its infancy (Addae and Ellenwood, 2021). Higher education institutions (HEI) are under pressure to promote entrepreneurship which creates social value and focuses on social innovation (Tomasella et al., 2022). Moreover, HEIs are tasked with the challenge of building students’ awareness of social welfare and equip them with knowledge to implement solutions to social and environmental problems (Pache and Chowdhury, 2012; García-González and Ramírez-Montoya, 2021). Some of the challenges of teaching social entrepreneurship are due to the fact that there is no universal definition of a social enterprise (Kerlin, 2006; Rostron, 2015), this is owing to the social enterprise sector being described as too wide-ranging to embrace a single definition (Defourny and Nyssens, 2021). However, current literature emphasises the distinct positioning of social enterprises from traditional commercial businesses and non-for-profit organisations. Social enterprises are generally

described as mission or purpose led businesses, which focus on a combination of social and environmental objectives and aim to generate profit for social impact (Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006; Fisher, 2016; Seelos and Mair, 2017; Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2019; Weaver, 2021). Therefore, as social enterprises pursue a triple bottom line (Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2019) teaching and learning in this field requires specialised training in understanding both the entrepreneurial and social (Chell et al., 2007; Tracey and Phillips, 2007; Weaver, 2021).

Yet, research relating to SEE is not as robust as traditional entrepreneurship education (García-González and Ramírez-Montoya, 2020). There is a need to investigate and provide evidence of the optimal curriculum design, and teaching methods to enhance the quality and effectiveness of SEE programmes (Howorth et al., 2011; Henry, 2020; Mir Shahid and Alarifi, 2021). It is argued that SEE educators still rely on adapting pedagogical approaches used within entrepreneurship education (Solbreux and Pondeville, 2022). Equally, there is the challenge of SEE curricula blending with nonprofit management education (Mirabella and Young, 2012). Another factor is SEE educators depend on their existing networks and previous experiences, which impacts their ability to develop curriculum content and appropriate teaching methods (Kickul *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, Kwong et al. (2022) argues that further research is needed to evaluate the impact of the varying pedagogical approaches adopted in SEE and calls for a systematic review. Therefore, this research aims to provide a holistic review of SEE programmes in the UK addressing the following research question and objectives:

Research Question: To what extent does social entrepreneurship education in the UK equip an individual to initiate a social enterprise.

Research Objectives:

1. To evaluate the current content designs, learning methods and pedagogical frameworks used within social entrepreneurship education in the UK.
2. To analyse the perceptions of social entrepreneurship education of individuals who have engaged in the social enterprise sector in the UK.
3. To investigate the factors influencing the decision making process of social entrepreneurs during the formation of a social enterprise.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum Content

Social entrepreneurship is recognised as multidisciplinary field of study, which has evolved from being offered primarily through business schools to diverse disciplines including social work, law, sociology, healthcare, education, engineering, and design (Brock and Kim, 2011; Nandan and Scott, 2013; Jensen, 2014; Hirst et al., 2020; Nakao and Nishide, 2020; Hussain et al., 2022). Several studies have addressed the challenges of designing social entrepreneurship curriculums (Roslan *et al.*, 2022). Brock and Steiner's (2009) content analysis of 107 SEE syllabi finds that SEE courses were simply providing an "overview" of social entrepreneurship and the topics that require covering include, "addressing social needs/problems that make a positive contribution to the community, innovation, scaling a social venture, resource acquisition, opportunity recognition, creating a sustainable business model and measuring outcomes" (Brock and Steiner, 2009). This study also noted that one of the greatest challenges involved in teaching SEE is educating students how to scale social innovations (Brock and

Steiner, 2009). Developing on this, Kickul et al.'s (2018) research calls for a design thinking approach to enhance the practical and theoretical learning within SEE and introduces a framework based on four "mega-themes", (1) innovation, (2) impact, (3) sustainability, (4) scale. However, although a design thinking approach can be effective, it is also time-consuming and expensive for educators. Mirabella and Eikenberry's (2017) critical review of SEE in the US finds that course syllabi had little focus on the social and more on conventional management. The cause of this is that the content of these programmes is led by funders and policy makers rather than practitioners in the SE sector. They argue that the curricula should highlight social enterprise value, ethical reasoning, building social capital and democratic governance (Mirabella and Eikenberry, 2017). Nakao and Nishide's (2020) study provided an analysis of Japanese universities, and similar to Brock and Steiner's (2009) findings, they found that the majority of courses were focused on developing the students' broad understanding of social entrepreneurship. Other studies have focused on the student perspective, for instance, Yasin and Khansari's (2021) study examines the effectiveness of a SEE course in the United Arab Emirates on developing the students' enterprising characteristics, such as creativity, risk taking, autonomy, locus of control. Adopting a similar approach, a study conducted in the US, argues that SEE pedagogy should focus on building emotional intelligence and empathy to enable students to create solutions to social issues (Greene and Cooper, 2016). Although this study is limited to analysing the delivery of a single online SEE programme at Portland State University (PSU), they did find that PSU's approach of embracing the input of students, academic staff but also professional students and experts to design the programme effective (Greene and Cooper, 2016). Specifically, within the UK, Conway's (2008) paper reviews the content of a graduate SEE course design which focuses on business planning for social enterprises and emphasises Tracey and Phillips (2007) argument, that although there are similarities in business planning for commercial and social enterprises, there are distinct differences which require a specialized course design in social entrepreneurship to meet student needs. A more recent UK study explores the teaching content and syllabus of 5 UK business schools offering SEE courses and presents a model for SEE educators to help develop social entrepreneurs who are responsible social innovators (Amundam, 2019). However, despite the UK being identified as a climate that is supportive of SE, there is no up to date comprehensive analysis of the current offering of SEE programmes across the multidisciplinary disciplines and levels of education, which accounts for business support, mentoring and training programmes which are accessible to social entrepreneurs.

2.2 Teaching and Learning in Social Entrepreneurship Education

A number of academic works suggest various approaches to develop teaching strategies for enhancing student learning within social entrepreneurship (Kickul *et al.*, 2021; Alourhzal *et al.*, 2022). Research considers several pedagogical methods employed in teaching SEE, such as networking, social enterprise case studies, and developing social projects (Amundam, 2019). More traditional methods have also been discussed, such as class discussions, groupwork and lectures to embed theory and provide students with the background knowledge of social entrepreneurship (Nakao and Nishide, 2020). Tracey and Phillip's seminal paper (2007) outlines key activities that should be involved in educating social entrepreneurs, including threading social entrepreneurship into entrepreneurship programmes, inviting guest speakers, encouraging students to engage in social enterprise consultancy projects and business planning

assignments on developing their own social venture. To revisit Brock and Steiner's (2009) work, they find that the most used teaching method employed in teaching social entrepreneurship is service learning through experiential learning, which actively engages the student with the course content. This is discussed further in Hockert's (2018) research, which emphasises the impact of experiential learning on students' entrepreneurial intentions. Weaver's (2020) teaching guide also advocates a practical approach to teaching social entrepreneurship using experiential teaching methods, including written and digital case studies, working with social enterprises, and participating in social business pitch competitions. Thomsen et al.'s (2019) argues that students should be taken out of the classroom, moving away from traditional entrepreneurship pedagogical methods, by working with host organisations on social projects through a "backpack-bootstrapping" approach (Thomsen et al., 2019). This is echoed by Gundlach and Zivnuska (2010) who recognise the benefits of experiential learning in SEE for enhancing knowledge, but also argues that this approach helps students to develop their passion, which is necessary in social entrepreneurship. Although there is a common trend that an active learning approach is most appropriate for SEE, there are challenges that need to be addressed for this approach to be effective (Chang et al., 2014). Addae and Ellenwood (2021) argue that experiential learning alone is not enough, and an emphasis on active learning results in a lack of attention to the theoretical foundation of social entrepreneurship. Fernhaber (2021) discusses the practical challenges of active learning and introduces a combined method of in class teaching to focus on the foundational concepts and active engagement with social enterprises for students to practise applying the taught concepts. In addition to experiential teaching methods, various other approaches have been discussed. For instance, Elmes et al (2012) study looks at a new approach to teaching SEE, which recognises the role of place and place making whereas Smith et al., (2010) advocates the use of simulation as a method of developing the students' empathy and ability to promote change. While Talmage and Gassert (2021) state that SEE courses should develop students' critical thinking by applying a teaching framework that enhances students' understanding of dark side theory within social entrepreneurship. Yet, as acknowledged by Alourhzal et al (2022) not one teaching method has been justified empirically by trainers and educators, which still leaves the challenge of knowing which of the several teaching strategies are the most appropriate for preparing future social entrepreneurs.

3. Conceptual Framework

Studies on entrepreneurial intention have adopted various models (Tiwari et al., 2017). The model most used to investigate the pre-entrepreneurial phase is Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB), which proposes that intentions are determined by personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Other models include Sarasvathy's (2001) theory of effectuation, which analyses entrepreneurial behaviour and explores the decision-making process when creating a new entrepreneurial venture through five principles (Sarasvathy, 2008). Drawing on Mair and Noboa's work (2006) which integrates the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and model of entrepreneurial event (Shapero and Sokol, 1982) this study will adopt a related approach, combining Ajzen's (1991) TPB and Sarasvathy's (2001) theory of

effectuation as a conceptual framework (Figure 1) to investigate the process of becoming a social entrepreneur.

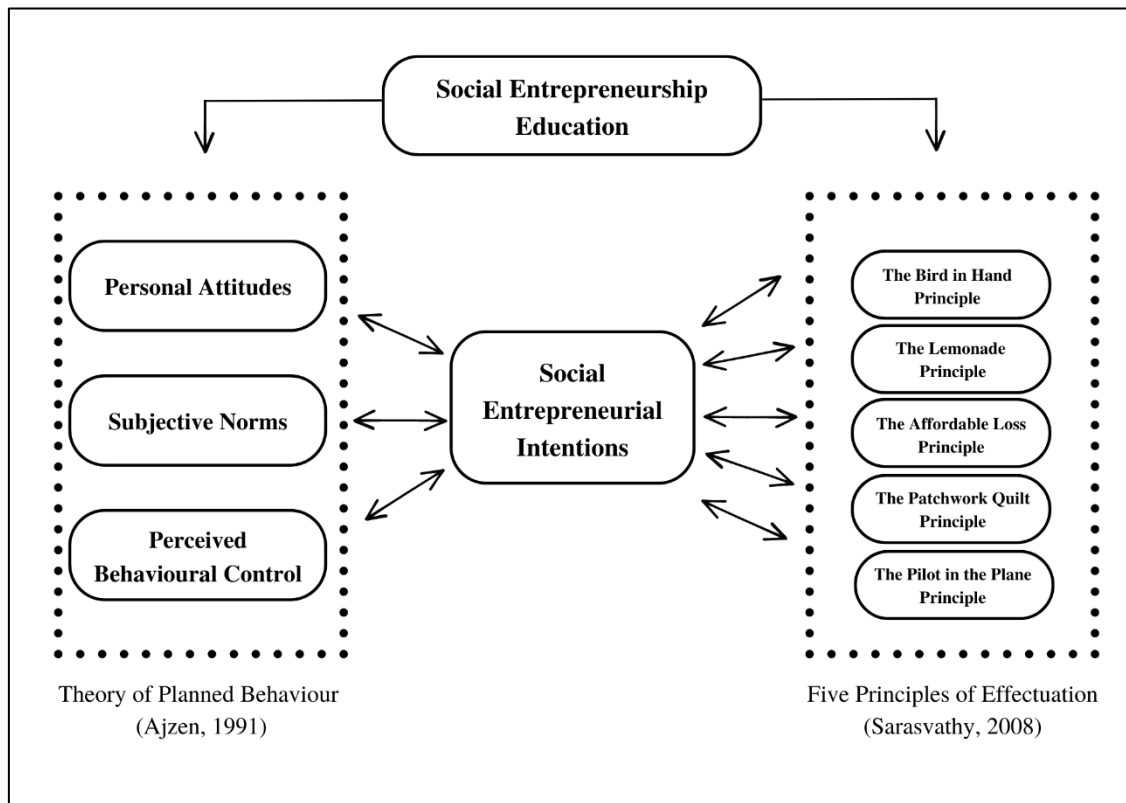


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Self-Created)

4. Methodology

To investigate the outlined research objectives, this study will adopt a mixed methods approach. To address objective 1, the research will conduct a web-based content analysis of SEE courses, business support and training programmes available to social entrepreneurs in the UK, this will include collecting secondary data on programme descriptions, syllabi, learning and participant outcomes. This will contribute to establishing the relevance and accessibility of SEE for social entrepreneurs. To address objectives 2 and 3, the research will collect primary data through conducting two sets of semi-structured interviews, firstly with individuals who have initiated a social enterprise in the UK following the completion of some form of SEE programme and individuals who have initiated a social enterprise in the UK without engaging in SEE programmes. For the purpose of this study, the research will focus on individuals who have initiated a social enterprise registered in the UK as a Community Interest Company (CIC). The interviews will gather data regarding the social entrepreneurs' background, existing networks and experiences, motivation to start a social enterprise, engagement with support when initiating their social venture, and influences on their decision

making during the formation stage of a social enterprise. This primary data will be analysed using a semantic analytical method.

5. Potential Theoretical Contribution

As identified, the current research limits their focus on primarily investigating SEE contributions made in HEI, researching students' perception and the social entrepreneurial intentions of those who have engaged in SEE at a higher education level. There is a need for further research to be conducted, which also examines the intentions and perceptions of social entrepreneurs operating in the SE sector from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. This will bring their expert insights of working in SE to assess the extent to which SEE meets the complex needs of the sector and equips future social entrepreneurs with the experience, knowledge and skills required. Moreover, this study will focus on evaluating SEE courses that are offered outside of conventional education, such as mentoring, community initiatives, and business support programmes which are accessible to social entrepreneurs during the formation stage of a social venture. This will contribute to existing research which provides a content analysis of SEE.

6. Plan to Develop Working Paper

This study is within its first year of development, therefore there is a need to refine the conceptual framework and methodology. I would welcome feedback on these two areas in particular. I would also appreciate opportunities for collaboration and support connecting with potential participants who may be relevant to the study.

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