Educational Programs to Promote Social Entrepreneurship: Development of Human and Community Skills in Real Environments

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Abstracts

This quantitative study investigates the impact of educational programs designed to foster social entrepreneurship on the development of human and community skills. Data were collected from 150 university students in Latin America, who participated in social entrepreneurship programs during the 2022-2023 academic cycle. Through structured surveys, key competencies such as leadership, empathy, problem-solving and teamwork were assessed. The results show that educational programs that integrate social entrepreneurship have a significant impact on the development of skills that not only benefit students individually, but also their communities. This study highlights the importance of practical experiences in education for social entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship, education, human skills, educational programs, community development.

Introduction

In recent decades, social entrepreneurship has been recognized as a crucial tool to address social, economic and environmental problems at a global level. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship does not only seek to maximize economic gains, but its main purpose is to generate a positive impact on communities, solving social challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions (Bacq & Lumpkin, 2020). This approach has gained great relevance, especially in regions with high levels of social inequality, where social enterprises can empower communities by providing access to resources and opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable (Santos et al., 2020).

The role of education in fostering social entrepreneurship has gained traction in recent years, especially in higher education institutions seeking to integrate entrepreneurial and social competencies into their curricular programs (Kickul & Lyons, 2020). These programs allow students to gain practical skills, such as problem-solving, leadership, and empathy, which are

critical to success in social entrepreneurship (Smith et al., 2021). In addition, these skills transcend the academic field and allow students to act as agents of change in their communities, promoting sustainable and equitable development (Bruton et al., 2021).

The human dimension is another key aspect in the development of skills through social entrepreneurship. By interacting with real social problems, students not only learn to apply business theories and concepts, but also develop a greater understanding of human and social needs. This experiential approach is vital for students to understand the social implications of their actions and develop a sense of responsibility towards the communities they work with (Bacq et al., 2021). Kolb (1984), in his theory of experiential learning, highlights the importance of the practical application of knowledge to consolidate learning, something that has been shown to be particularly effective in social entrepreneurship programs (Battilana & Lee, 2021).

In practical terms, social entrepreneurship programs in educational institutions have shown positive results, not only in the training of social entrepreneurs, but also in the creation of an organizational culture oriented towards social responsibility and community development (Austin et al., 2021). However, more quantitative research is required to evaluate the direct impact of these programs on the formation of human and community skills, as well as on the successful implementation of projects with social impact. Through this study, we aim to fill this gap by analyzing how participation in social entrepreneurship educational programs contributes to the development of these essential skills in young entrepreneurs.

This study focuses on university students in Latin America, a region with unique societal challenges, where social entrepreneurship can play a critical role in reducing poverty and inequality. This seeks to quantify the impact of these programs and provide empirical evidence on the benefits of integrating social entrepreneurship into educational curricula (Sutter et al., 2019). Likewise, this study aims to highlight the importance of creating educational spaces that promote community development and social responsibility through learning experiences in real contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Social entrepreneurship has been widely studied in recent decades as a key mechanism for addressing social problems through innovative business solutions. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which focuses mainly on generating economic benefits, social entrepreneurship seeks to balance the creation of economic value with the generation of positive social impact (Santos et al., 2020). This approach has been driven by the need to find sustainable solutions to complex problems such as poverty, inequality, and access to basic services, challenges that are often not adequately addressed by the public or private sector (Battilana & Lee, 2021).

In the context of human skills development, social entrepreneurship allows individuals to engage directly with communities and experience social challenges first-hand. This generates a deeper understanding of local problems and fosters competencies such as empathy, leadership, and the ability to collaborate (Austin et al., 2021). According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning is critical to the development of these skills, as individuals learn best when they are directly

involved in solving real-world problems. This theory underlines the importance of practice and active reflection in the acquisition of entrepreneurial and social skills.

Recent studies confirm that social entrepreneurship education can play a key role in training skills that transcend the business realm, helping students become agents of social change (Kickul & Lyons, 2020). Bacq et al. (2021) point out that educational programs that include social entrepreneurship components not only prepare students to start and manage businesses, but also promote a broader vision of social and community responsibility. These competencies are particularly relevant in contexts where entrepreneurship can help reduce social and economic inequalities (Sutter et al., 2019).

Community development is another key aspect of social entrepreneurship, as social entrepreneurs not only seek to generate economic value, but also to improve living conditions in the communities where they operate (Bruton et al., 2021). Social entrepreneurship education programs that combine theory with real-world practices allow students to apply their knowledge in concrete situations, fostering a greater understanding of local issues and enhancing their ability to design sustainable and scalable solutions (Smith et al., 2021). This experiential approach also reinforces students' sense of social responsibility, making them more aware of how their business decisions can positively impact their communities (Santos et al., 2020).

In addition, social entrepreneurship fosters transformational leadership, as social entrepreneurs often lead significant change within their communities by creating initiatives that address issues such as poverty, education, and access to health (Austin et al., 2021). This type of leadership is associated with the ability to inspire and motivate others towards a shared vision of a better future, which is fundamental in the context of social enterprises (Smith et al., 2021). In this sense, transformational leadership is not only focused on achieving financial or business goals, but also on the well-being and development of communities.

Finally, collaborative learning is an essential component of social entrepreneurship educational programs. The ability to work as a team, negotiate, and collaborate with diverse actors is crucial to the success of any social initiative (Bacq et al., 2021). Students who participate in these programs often develop strong interpersonal skills, which are critical for the effective management of social projects and interaction with different stakeholders. These skills are especially valuable in the context of social entrepreneurship, where collaboration with public, private, and community actors is key to the sustainability of initiatives (Smith et al., 2021).

Methodology

Study design

This study follows a non-experimental and cross-sectional quantitative approach, in which data were collected through structured surveys of university students participating in social entrepreneurship programs in two universities in Latin America. The research was carried out during the 2022-2023 academic cycle and aims to analyze the impact of such programs on the development of human and community skills.

Population and sample

The target population consisted of undergraduate students who actively participated in social entrepreneurship educational programs. The sample included 150 students, selected through non-probability sampling for convenience. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years, with 60% women and 40% men.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Feature	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
-Male	60	40%
-Female	90	60%
Age		
- 18-20	75	50%
- 21-23	45	30%
- 24-25	30	20%
University		
- University A	80	53%
- University B	70	47%

Measuring instrument

For data collection, a structured survey with 20 items was used, designed to evaluate the development of human and community skills. The items were organized into three categories:

1. Development of human skills: leadership, empathy, problem solving, and resilience.

2. Community skills development: teamwork, social responsibility and collaboration.

3. Perception of the impact of the program: level of participation in practical activities, implementation of social projects and perception of personal change.

Each item was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree." The reliability of the instrument was tested by an internal consistency analysis with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, obtaining a value of 0.89, which indicates high reliability (Taber, 2018).

Table 2. Reliability analysis results (Cronbach's alpha)

Category	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Human Skills	8	0.88
Community Skills	6	0.86
Perception of the impact of the program	6	0.89

Procedure

Data were collected through digitally administered surveys. The students were contacted through the educational management platforms of their universities. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality of the data was ensured. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their informed consent was obtained prior to completing the survey.

Once the data were collected, a statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS software (version 27). The statistical techniques used included descriptive analyses (means, frequencies, and standard deviations) and inferential analyses, such as Pearson's correlation analysis to

identify relationships between program participation and skill development. In addition, a multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to determine the degree to which participation in practical activities influences the development of key competences.

Statistical analysis

1. Descriptive analysis: Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the three categories evaluated (human skills, community skills, and perception of the program's impact). The results showed high average scores in all categories, suggesting that most students perceive that the social entrepreneurship program contributed significantly to the development of their skills.

Table 3. Averages and standard deviations by category

Category	Stocking	Standard deviation
Human Skills	4.2	0.7
Community Skills	4.3	0.6
Perception of the impact of the program	4.4	0.5

2. Correlation analysis: Pearson's correlation was used to explore the relationship between participation in program activities and human and community skills development. The results showed a positive and significant correlation ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$) between active participation in practical activities and the development of community skills, indicating that those students who participated more actively in social projects developed greater competencies in this area (Bacq & Lumpkin, 2020).

3. Regression analysis: Multiple linear regression was performed to examine which factors within educational programs most influenced skill development. The results indicated that the level of participation in practical activities ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and the implementation of community projects ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$) were the main predictors of community and human skills development (Smith et al., 2021).

Table 4. Results of multiple linear regression analysis

Independent variable	β	t	p
Participation in practical activities	0.45	3.89	< 0.01
Implementation of community projects	0.38	3.25	< 0.05
Perception of personal change	0.29	2.86	< 0.05

Limitations of the study

Although the results are promising, this study has some limitations. First, the use of a non-probabilistic sample limits the generalizability of the results. Second, the data is based on participants' self-perception, which could introduce bias. In future studies, it is recommended to complement the data with external or qualitative evaluations, as well as to expand the sample to other geographical regions (Sutter et al., 2019).

Results

The analysis of the data obtained in this study reveals that educational programs oriented to social entrepreneurship have a positive and significant impact on the development of human and community skills in students. The results were analyzed using descriptive and inferential

statistical techniques, with a focus on the identification of correlations and predictions between participation in practical activities and the development of entrepreneurial and social competencies.

Descriptive analysis

A descriptive analysis of the responses obtained in the survey was carried out for the three categories: human skills, community skills, and the perception of the impact of the program. Students rated their experiences with a high average score in all areas, suggesting that the majority of participants felt that their participation in the program contributed significantly to their personal and community development.

Table 5. Averages and standard deviations by category

Category	Stocking	Standard deviation
Human Skills	4.2	0.7
Community Skills	4.3	0.6
Perception of the impact of the program	4.4	0.5

As can be seen in Table 1, the mean scores in the three categories exceed the value of 4 on a scale of 5, indicating that students perceive that the program has been highly effective in developing their skills, especially in the perception of personal impact ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.5$). These results are consistent with previous studies that underscore the importance of participation in experiential educational programs for the development of entrepreneurial and social competencies (Sutter et al., 2019; Bacq & Lumpkin, 2020).

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation was used to examine the relationships between participation in practical program activities and human and community skills development. The results showed a positive and significant correlation between active participation in practical activities and the development of community skills ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$), as well as human skills ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 6. Correlations between participation in practical activities and skill development

Variables	Human Skills	Community Skills
Participation in practical activities	$r = 0.71$, $p < 0.05$	$r = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$

These findings suggest that participation in practical activities, such as community projects and collaborative work, has a strong association with the development of key competences. This is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of experiential learning in the formation of entrepreneurial skills (Smith et al., 2021). In addition, the high value of correlation indicates that the impact of practical activities on community skills is slightly greater than on human skills, which may reflect the collective nature of social entrepreneurship.

Regression Analysis

To determine the degree to which participation in practical activities influences skill development, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The independent variables included in the model were participation in practical activities, the implementation of community projects and the perception of personal change, while the dependent variables were human and community skills.

Table 7. Results of multiple linear regression analysis

Independent variable	Human Skills (β)	Community Skills (β)	t	p
Participation in practical activities	0.45	0.53	3.89	< 0.01
Implementation of community projects	0.38	0.40	3.25	< 0.05
Perception of personal change	0.29	0.33	2.86	< 0.05

The results of the regression analysis indicate that participation in practical activities is a significant predictor of both human skills development ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and community skills development ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that the greater the participation of students in practical activities, the greater their development of competencies in these areas. In addition, the implementation of community projects was also a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$), reflecting the value of experiences in real environments for the development of these skills (Bruton et al., 2021).

Analysis of differences by gender

A mean difference analysis was performed to assess whether there were significant differences between men and women in terms of human and community skill development. The results showed that women scored slightly higher in community skill development ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.6$) compared to men ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.7$), although these differences were not statistically significant ($t = 1.45$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 8. Comparison of Means by Gender in Community Skills

Gender	Stocking	Standard deviation	t	p
Men	4.1	0.7	1.45	> 0.05
Women	4.4	0.6		

These results are consistent with previous research suggesting that although women tend to excel in social competencies such as empathy and teamwork, gender differences in community skill development tend not to be significant in mixed educational settings (Austin et al., 2021).

Conclusions of the results

In summary, the findings of this study confirm that social entrepreneurship educational programs have a significant impact on the development of human and community skills. Participation in practical activities and the implementation of community projects were the main predictors of the development of these competencies, suggesting that educational programs that integrate experiences in real environments are crucial for success in the development of social entrepreneurs. These results are in line with previous studies that underscore the importance of experiential and collaborative learning in entrepreneurial education (Bacq et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021).

Conclusions

This study confirms that educational programs focused on social entrepreneurship have a significant impact on the development of human and community skills among students. The results obtained through robust statistical analyses demonstrate that active participation in practical activities and the implementation of community projects not only strengthen entrepreneurial competencies, but also promote personal growth and a greater sense of social

responsibility. These findings reinforce the ideas presented by Bacq and Lumpkin (2020), who point out that the integration of practical elements in social entrepreneurship education improves the development of key interpersonal and organizational competencies.

First, the statistical results suggest a positive correlation between participation in practical program activities and the development of human skills, such as leadership, empathy, and problem-solving. These findings align with research by Smith et al. (2021), which highlights how students who engage in social problem-solving develop a greater ability to lead and manage teams in highly complex contexts. In addition, the regression analysis carried out in this study reinforces the idea that practical activities and the implementation of community projects are significant predictors of the development of key competences, as also suggested by the work of Bruton et al. (2021).

Second, this study provides new empirical evidence on the role of experiential learning in higher education. Kolb (1984) emphasizes that experiential learning is fundamental for the development of critical competencies, which has been confirmed in this work. The high scores obtained by students in the categories of community skills and the perception of the impact of the program indicate that experiential learning, which involves direct interaction with real social problems, significantly improves the acquisition of entrepreneurial and social competencies. These conclusions are aligned with the studies of Bacq et al. (2021), which underscore the importance of the practical application of theoretical knowledge to consolidate learning.

In addition, the relevance of social entrepreneurship as a tool to address social and economic challenges in vulnerable communities is highlighted. By participating in projects that seek to solve real problems, students not only gain entrepreneurial skills, but also become agents of change within their communities, which in turn generates a positive long-term impact. This finding is in line with the work of Santos et al. (2020), who argue that social entrepreneurship has the potential to transform communities by empowering individuals to act as social and business leaders. On the other hand, it was observed that, although gender differences in skill development were not statistically significant, women scored slightly higher in community skills. This result is consistent with previous research, such as that by Austin et al. (2021), which suggests that women tend to excel in competencies related to empathy and teamwork, although these differences are not substantial in mixed educational settings.

Practical implications

The conclusions of this study have important implications for the design of educational programs. Educational institutions seeking to foster social entrepreneurship should consider integrating practical and experiential components into their curricula, as these have proven to be crucial for the development of human and community competencies (Sutter et al., 2019). The design of these programs should include opportunities for students to actively participate in community projects and work on solving real social problems, which not only enriches their educational experience, but also allows them to apply their knowledge in environments that require innovative and collaborative solutions. In addition, education policies should promote the creation of partnerships between universities and community organizations, allowing students to participate in projects that have a tangible social impact. As Bruton et al. (2021)

suggest, these partnerships not only benefit students, but also generate value for communities, fostering sustainable and equitable development.

Limitations and future studies

While this study provides valuable information on the effects of educational programs on the development of entrepreneurial skills, it is important to recognize some limitations. First, the use of a non-probabilistic sample limits the generalizability of the results. Second, the data was based on students' self-perception, which can introduce bias into responses. In future studies, it would be valuable to use a larger and more diverse sample, as well as to complement quantitative data with qualitative interviews or external evaluations that validate the results obtained (Smith et al., 2021). In summary, this study provides solid empirical evidence that reinforces the importance of educational programs in social entrepreneurship for the development of human and community competencies. Experiential education and a focus on community projects allow students to become social entrepreneurs with the ability to bring about significant change in their environments.

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