

Social Entrepreneurship Competency

Subjects: **Education & Educational Research**

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The complexity of today's world demands a shift in education from knowledge acquisition to competency development for students to effectively address profession-related challenges. In particular, there is a need for social entrepreneurs who can act as catalysts for change in complex environments.

professional education

educational innovation

future of education

social entrepreneurship

quality education

higher education

1. Introduction

In today's complex world, educating future professionals can no longer be based exclusively on acquiring knowledge but also on the skills students must develop to face specific problems in their profession and daily lives. Therefore, universities have increasingly been paying more attention to competency-based education, considering that providing skills implies a higher level of cognitive development than just acquiring knowledge ^[1]. On the other hand, contemporary educational institutions have adopted a dual profile of social responsibility, ensuring their work as trainers of professionals and as social agents that contribute to resolving current and future challenges and problems ^[2]. Thus, students develop competencies and skills that allow them to achieve professional excellence and make them responsible citizens of the world who are aware of the needs of their environment ^[3].

In this sense, the international organization Ashoka, with its university program Ashoka U, has emphasized the relevance of leveraging students' skills and competencies to address local problems by generating social entrepreneurship, which allows them to have a vision for the community ^[4]. Therefore, training in social entrepreneurship has become strategic for competencies and skills linked to commitment, change, and social responsibility ^[5]. However, for an optimal level of development of the social entrepreneurship competency and its sub-competencies, it is necessary to sow in students a positive perception of their skills, i.e., an entrepreneurial spirit ^[6].

2. Social Entrepreneurship in Mexico

When talking about entrepreneurship, it is usually regarded as the attitude that people have to plan, organize, and propose new projects while seeking to establish a structured process that allows them to achieve their goals ^[7]. Entrepreneurship has a clear relationship with innovation, since, in both cases, the aim is to develop ideas that

fulfill a purpose, which may be social, economic, or political, among others. Currently, entrepreneurship has become a prominent topic in educational and university settings, driven by the recognition that professional training and the cultivation of leadership skills remain incomplete without the ability to transform ideas into tangible projects [\[8\]](#).

However, it is not possible to believe that entrepreneurship is only motivated by economic purposes since in the last decade it has become increasingly common to find innovative and entrepreneurial projects that aim to contribute to solving a social or human problem [\[9\]](#). Social entrepreneurship is a business approach that focuses on addressing social and environmental problems through innovative and sustainable solutions. Unlike traditional businesses, which primarily seek to generate profits for their owners, social entrepreneurship aims to create a positive impact on society and the planet.

Social entrepreneurs work in areas such as education, health, poverty, social justice, and the environment, including many other important issues. They seek to identify social and environmental problems and develop innovative and sustainable solutions to address them. Often, social entrepreneurs work in collaboration with non-profit organizations, governments, and businesses to maximize their impact [\[10\]](#).

Entrepreneurship in Mexico has been characterized by growth over the past five years. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [\[11\]](#) indicates that Mexico is characterized by the fact that its economy is based on manufacturing, like several other Latin American countries, which means that, unlike other countries, it is based on efficiency. This means that most entrepreneurs are driven by the opportunities they see in context rather than by necessity and, consequently, the opportunity to innovate is left behind [\[12\]](#).

However, from 2015 to 2020, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) reported a significant 11.4% rise in early entrepreneurial activity, indicating an increase in the number of individuals embarking on business ventures. Despite 45% of the adult population recognizing favorable business prospects, the prevailing uncertain and unstable global and national conditions led to a decline in the percentage of people who felt confident in seizing these opportunities. In this same sense, the outlook was considered favorable for the development of social enterprises. According to the GEM data, international organizations such as Ashoka Mexico or Promotora Social, as well as some universities, paid more attention to the promotion of social entrepreneurship among their students, which triggered strong ecosystems for the development of social innovation [\[13\]](#).

Thus, from 2015 to 2020, there was an 18% growth in the number of social enterprises, with the key objective of addressing social and environmental problems in the region, legally incorporated in the country. However, despite these numbers, social entrepreneurship is still underrepresented in the country's economy since, according to data from the Mexican Institute of Finance Executives (IMEF), by 2020 there was a record of only 305 social enterprises which generated no more than 10 million pesos per year [\[14\]](#). This shows the clear need to promote this type of entrepreneurship in Mexico and the Latin American region, especially because of the clear opportunities for development that can occur in a region experiencing an increase in innovation projects focused on addressing local problems.

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3. About Social Entrepreneurship Training

Talking about social entrepreneurship is not new, as several academic studies have been conducted since the 1980s ^{[15][16]}. What is innovative, however, is the attention paid in the last decade to research focused on social entrepreneurship training in consideration of the decisive role that educational institutions have in developing entrepreneurial spirit and providing future entrepreneurs with the skills and tools necessary to materialize their social projects ^[17].

As previously mentioned, the international organization Ashoka specializes in the work performed by universities and educational institutions in social entrepreneurship training, paying particular attention to entrepreneurial development with the perspective that all people, with the proper support, can become agents of change ^[4]. Its university program, AshokaU, seeks to promote social entrepreneurship through the development of competencies, skills, and training tools by considering that an agent of change, regardless of their previous experience, sex, gender, age, and economic, social, or geographical reality, can revolutionize their environment when they exercise their skills and capacity for action to solve social problems ^[12].

In this sense, studies such as those by Light ^[18] or Lackéus ^[19] pointed out that the profile of social entrepreneurs, although similar to traditional entrepreneurs, includes personal and cognitive values and preferences beyond professional skills. To Saenz and Lopez ^[20], social entrepreneurs tend to have more in-depth personal and social bonding skills than commercial entrepreneurs, which also aligns with Velasco-Martínez et al. ^[21] who proposed that social entrepreneurship competency responds to instrumental, systematic, and interpersonal aspects.

Complementing the above, Shapovalov et al. ^[22] indicated that social entrepreneurs must have a vision that includes the environment and all those who are a part of the system surrounding the problem or challenge to be addressed. Thus, the entrepreneur must identify, create, and develop opportunities without losing sight of people. García-González et al. ^[23] proposed that social entrepreneurship competency includes five sub-competencies with 22 indicators which consider personal, leadership, social innovation, social value, and entrepreneurial management elements. This proposal suggests that, beyond focusing on developing social entrepreneurship competency, one should measure the participants' level of perception of their achievement, which aligns with Ashoka's vision ^[4] of developing entrepreneurship beyond social entrepreneurial projects.

From this perspective, this research shines the light on people and not so much on ventures, seeking to identify whether individual characteristics such as gender, age, and disciplinary area of study can influence the institutional objectives for a satisfactory level of students' perceived social entrepreneurial competency. In addition, it is noteworthy that this research considers gender and not the sex of the participants because assessing perception requires focusing on the students' emotions and sensitivities and not so much on their corporeality.

4. Gender and Its Influence on Social Entrepreneurship

Based on studies conducted in the United Kingdom by Levie and Hart ^[24], the gender of entrepreneurs is relevant when deciding the objective of entrepreneurial projects. This was corroborated by Lerner and Schwartz ^[25] who found a tendency on the part of women to carry out social and environmental ventures above traditional projects. Likewise, Anggahegari et al. ^[26] indicated that female entrepreneurship tends to go beyond generating economic value and considers aspects of sustainability and social benefits to the community.

According to Gupta and colleagues ^[27], traditional entrepreneurship exhibits a significant gender disparity, with a higher proportion of men than women. However, this gap is not as apparent in social entrepreneurship as female entrepreneurs participate equally with their male counterparts. According to Dickel and Eckardt's ^[28] study of 600 students, women tend to desire social entrepreneurship more, corresponding to competencies traditionally linked to their gender.

However, somewhat arguably, a dangerous relativism in the studies on the tendencies or perceptions of women at the time of entrepreneurship may exist. If, as pointed out by Dickel and Eckardt ^[28] and Chell et al. ^[29], the values attributed to gender influence the perception and decisions concerning entrepreneurship, it opens the possibility that there is also an influence of morality and regional imaginary or in the opportunities in the environment to accept and invest in ventures led by women.

Gilmartin et al. ^[30] analyzed the entrepreneurial intention of a group of university men and women, discovering that the personal sphere becomes a determining influence when proposing a business idea or organization. This had already been pointed out by Arredondo et al. ^[31] when they recognized that the low participation of women in technological entrepreneurship did not respond to the capacity of women entrepreneurs but to the low participation they had in STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and the regional situations that influenced their perception; their choice becomes more a response to their environment's reality than an argued personal interest.

Mensiez and Tatoff ^[32] and Peterson and Limbu ^[33] pointed out that women tend to be underrepresented as participants and collaborators in many entrepreneurial training programs, which is reflected in the absence of gender-focused metrics, the majority of male content, the use of entrepreneurial language and images that exclude women, and program administrators' limited knowledge about equity, diversity, and inclusion. This helps to construct the invisible barriers limiting young female students' training ^[34].

Beyond the university environment, according to a study conducted by the Escuela Superior de Administración y Dirección de Empresas ^[35], entrepreneurial intention in economic and technological areas already shows a clear gap between men and women in universities and it potentially widens when attempting to materialize the venture, i.e., while 46% of the ventures led by men received the economic support they needed, only 26% of female entrepreneurs had the same luck.

For all the above reasons, studies should emphasize the perception of female students, beginning with their first desire to become entrepreneurs, and pay particular attention not only to the gap between them and their male

peers but also to the strengths and opportunities they perceive in their sub-competencies, indicators, and skills necessary at the time of materializing a social venture. Thus, it would be possible to identify whether, beyond a desire or tendency for social entrepreneurship, women may be adapting their projects to areas in which they are believed to be more apt due to stereotypes or social imaginary.

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