

Developing social entrepreneurship skills in community projects for sustainable development goals



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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates how social entrepreneurship skills are cultivated among student teachers through participation in community-based projects aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected via semi-structured interviews to explore student teachers' perceptions of social entrepreneurship, the role of community service, and how such experiences contribute to their skill development. Findings reveal that engaging in these projects enhances students' sense of responsibility, collaboration, empathy, and innovation. Participants view community service not only as a means to address local needs but also as a platform for fostering sustainable social change and strengthening community bonds. These initiatives enable student teachers to become more socially aware and better equipped to respond to real-world challenges with entrepreneurial thinking. The research highlights the pivotal role of student teachers in shaping future societies and underscores the need to embed social entrepreneurship within teacher education programs. This study offers valuable insights for curriculum developers, policymakers, and educators aiming to align teacher education with global development goals. It advocates for evidence-based, community-focused learning experiences that promote leadership, adaptability, and social innovation key competencies for building inclusive, smart, and sustainable societies.

Contribution/ Originality: This study presents an original perspective on the research process, focusing on sustainable development goals and value-adding projects within society. Significantly, this study emphasizes the bridge between higher education and society through social responsibility projects. The study contributes to developing social entrepreneurship skills among learners, which they will carry into the workplace.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the world has experienced significant changes and transformations, and there has been a great explosion of information. The information produced in the last quarter-century has become as much as the total information throughout human history (Gedikoğlu, 2005). Regardless of their profession, every person needs to adapt to time and changing living conditions, incorporate innovations into their lives, and evaluate the opportunities around them (Yeşilkaya, 2016). Entrepreneurship is the process of providing social benefits and adding extra value to the existing situation in terms of meeting social needs (Yılmaz, 2014). The increasing poverty, unemployment, diseases, education, human rights, and housing issues in today's world highlight the

importance of the entrepreneurial characteristics mentioned above. The entrepreneurial spirit can be found in people genetically or can be acquired through education (Çolakoğlu & Çolakoğlu, 2016).

Austin, Gutierrez, Ogliastri, and Reficco (2007) define social entrepreneurship as an innovative activity that creates social value and can occur in both private and public sectors. This innovative process brings about social change and, over time, leads to social evolution, which involves comprehensive and generational shifts in a society's structure. A common thread in these definitions is the aim of addressing problems and meeting the needs of communities.

The social, ecological, and economic developments that we need to demonstrate with global competition awareness are only possible with the right education. Indeed, the purpose of education is to equip people with the knowledge and skills required by the age and to make them harmonious members of the modern world (Çelik, 2019). As stated by Polat (2020) countries have been constantly trying to renew and develop their education systems in order to build their future and prepare their individuals for life. This effort brings with it the need to adapt to the innovations required by the age and social change, and achieving this adaptation depends on raising individuals who are adequately equipped in every field. The education system should also prepare students for the future as more participatory, sharing, solution-oriented, and innovative individuals. Schools should always be open to innovation, have a structure where knowledge is produced and developed, individuals gain self-confidence, and develop creative and original thinking (Meydanoğlu, 2019). It has begun to be defined under images such as entrepreneurial universities. Sahap (2020) stated that universities, both in global changes and national development and development strategies, have to renew themselves according to the demands of the region, society and people they serve. Regardless of their name and title, universities must raise individuals who actively contribute to social and economic growth. In addition to their educational, teaching, and research purposes, universities are institutions that create value through their understanding of social responsibility. They have developed a university model that contributes to the development of the regions in which they are located, alongside their innovative and creative features (Çiftçi, 2010). The aim is for graduates of entrepreneurial universities to become job creators rather than job seekers, capable of transforming entrepreneurship into an interdisciplinary research topic and developing new business ideas. Although entrepreneurship is primarily perceived as a concept within the field of economics, it has now established itself as a skill in education and training (Yıldırım & Tuncay, 2019).

Within the scope of many studies conducted on social entrepreneurship, the following studies stand out the most in the literature; the importance of entrepreneurship, which plays a leading role in increasing the welfare levels of countries, is increasingly understood, and accordingly, entrepreneurship is encouraged more and more and is increasingly being the subject of research by academics (İşcan & Kaygın, 2011). Aytac and İlhan (2007) stated that entrepreneurship is not only an economic value but also a social and cultural phenomenon; Naktiyok and Bayrak-Kök (2006) stated that entrepreneurship covers the activities and changes made in all existing organizations. Otuya, Kibas, Gichira, and Martin (2013) stated that entrepreneurship education should be given at all levels of education, including preschool, primary school, secondary school and universities (Deveci, Zengin, & Çepni, 2015). Many researchers have examined the entrepreneurial characteristics of teacher candidates and have revealed important data. Ocağ and Su (2016) found that the entrepreneurship levels of education faculty students are high. Koçak and Özdemir (2015) examined the role of social entrepreneurship in the attitudes of prospective teachers towards school administration and concluded that the attitudes of prospective teachers towards school administration were moderate and their social entrepreneurship levels were quite high. Pan and Akay (2015) examined the entrepreneurship levels of education faculty students and stated that prospective teachers had a high entrepreneurship level. This result indicates that entrepreneurial characteristics should be incorporated into education faculty students' curricula, and their potential should be further developed. Therefore, the importance of the concept of entrepreneurship should be explained to education faculty students in relevant courses. Courses that emphasize the significance and value of entrepreneurship should be added to these programs. Education faculty

students should no longer be viewed solely as teachers who will work only in public institutions. Additionally, the necessary education and background information in the field of entrepreneurship should be provided (Ocak & Su, 2016). Deveci et al. (2015) stated that since entrepreneurship education is not a part of teachers' pre-service and in-service training, teachers are quite inadequate in preparing materials that will enable the development of entrepreneurial characteristics. Deveci et al. (2015) developed a five-week draft extracurricular education module to raise awareness of entrepreneurship among seventh-grade students on the grounds that since there is no activity in the content of the science program to develop entrepreneurial characteristics, it is much more important to organize extracurricular activities for entrepreneurship education.

William Drayton is credited with first defining social entrepreneurship in 1980, highlighting the potential of individuals to develop new approaches for addressing social issues. Drayton also founded Ashoka, a notable example of an organization established to provide support and funding for social entrepreneurs.

The areas of social entrepreneurship include women's rights, gender equality, education, health and nutrition, public safety, poverty alleviation, environmental issues, human rights, hunger, social justice, personal development, and unemployment (London & Morfopoulos, 2010).

The core objective of social entrepreneurship is to address social, cultural, or environmental challenges while creating sustainable, innovative, and ethical solutions that align with community needs.

The aim of this study is to reveal how social entrepreneurship skills are developed in social projects for sustainable development purposes, according to the opinions of university students. To achieve this aim, the research questions presented below and the opinions of the participants have been determined. In this context, the research questions are;

1. How do you define the concept of social entrepreneurship?
2. Why do you think community service projects are important?
3. What projects do you think should be undertaken to achieve sustainable development goals?
4. Do community service projects provide you with social entrepreneurship skills? Why?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Model

Qualitative research methods were also used in the research. "Qualitative research can be defined as research in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is followed to present perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in a natural environment" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). According to Kuş (2003), "The basic feature of qualitative research is to reveal the perspectives and worlds of meaning of the participants in the research and to see the world through the eyes of the participants."

2.2. Data Collection Tool

Within the scope of the qualitative research model, a semi-structured interview was conducted as a data collection tool to understand the perspectives and opinions of the participants (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). To ensure the internal validity of the interview form, it was reviewed by academicians from the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, to obtain expert opinions. Based on their feedback, the form was revised. Subsequently, a pilot interview was conducted with a study group equivalent to the target population. In this study, content analysis was employed to analyze and interpret the qualitative data obtained from the participants.

2.3. Study Group

This study was conducted with 180 participants from the current students of the university's Faculty of Education in December 2024. The participants who took part in the study were selected using the purposive random sampling method. Purposive random sampling is the classification of systematically and randomly selected case examples in a purposeful manner aligned with the study's objectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). At the same time, the reliability of the information collected with this method is accepted as higher.

The qualitative study group consisted of 180 students from the Faculty of Education, formed in March 2025. During the formation of the study group, students were selected using the purposive random sampling method.

2.4. Data Collection

180 participants were interviewed during the collection of qualitative data in the study. The participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and that the interview method would be used as the data collection method. Confidentiality and ethical rules were adhered to, and efforts were made to increase the participants' trust in the research. Participants who volunteered participated in the study.

2.5. Data Analysis

In data analysis, within the framework of content analysis, the answers provided to each question were categorized individually and organized into tables. After this initial categorization, the researcher re-examined the data to develop core themes and categories. These identified themes and categories were reviewed again in light of relevant literature, and categories displaying similar patterns were combined, while those with differences were separated into distinct categories and coded. Participants who responded to these categories were identified by numbers. Sentences extracted from the categories were presented as examples in the relevant section. The data obtained from the responses to the research interview questions were analyzed using content analysis, which involves four stages (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

1. Coding of Data: In this initial stage of content analysis, after each participant was assigned a number and the interview was transcribed, the data obtained from the participants were examined within the framework of the research, divided into meaningful sections, and the conceptual meaning they expressed was named and coded. The reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to calculate the reliability of the research, and an average of 94% was calculated. Reliability calculations above 70% are considered reliable for the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The results obtained here were considered reliable for the research. The codes that showed agreement in the coding performed by the researchers were used as the basis for identifying the themes.
2. Finding the themes: At this stage, the codes are determined based on separate categories and evaluated as individual themes.
3. Organizing and defining data according to codes and themes: At this stage, the participants' views were explained in language that the reader can understand, and the views were presented directly to the reader. Footnotes were used to identify which participant the interview notes belonged to, and the interview notes were presented in quotation marks.
4. Interpreting the findings: The researcher interpreted the findings, which were defined and presented in detail, and explained some of the results at this final stage.

3. FINDINGS

The findings of the research were presented based on the research questions and the results of these analyses. The answers provided to these questions were coded, and themes were extracted. The distributions regarding these themes are shown in Table 1.

Some of the participants' opinions regarding the findings on how the concept of social entrepreneurship is defined according to the views of the stakeholders are as follows.

K(74)“In my opinion, I can say that it should be a concept that develops people, connects them with the environment, and activates individuals who do not act shyly in social environments.”

K(37)“In my opinion, I believe that any initiative an individual takes to find a solution to a social problem, without expecting any material benefit, to eliminate or resolve that problem and to transform the current situation, is valuable.”

Table 1. Findings on how the concept of social entrepreneurship is defined.

Category	Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Thoughts on the findings regarding how the concept of social entrepreneurship is defined according to the views of stakeholders.	Social entrepreneurship promotes the development of individuals' sense of responsibility and sensitivity.	140	77%
	The individual is active in social environments without being shy. Entrepreneurship refers to individuals aiming to make a profit and excel in any field. Social entrepreneurship involves ensuring that everyone has access to resources without prioritizing people's rights and profit goals above or below the norm. It aims for social balance and development without making generalizations regarding people's welfare, peace, and health, and without seeking profit.	111	61%
	It is a concept that develops people, connects them with the environment, and activates the individual so that she does not act timidly in social environments.	99	55%
	Any attempt made by an individual to find a solution to a social problem, to eliminate or solve that problem, and to transform the current situation without expecting any material benefit.	121	67%

According to the views of the stakeholders, within the scope of the findings obtained regarding the concept of social entrepreneurship, it can be said that social entrepreneurship significantly contributes to the development of individuals' sense of responsibility and sensitivity, based on participant views. Additionally, participants indicate that it enables individuals to be active in social environments without feeling shy. Entrepreneurship is defined by participants as the individual's aim to make a profit in any field and to achieve the best results. Social entrepreneurship is also described as the individual's goal to ensure that everyone can access resources and opportunities without considering the rights and profit goals of others, aiming for development without compromising social balance, people's welfare, peace, and health, and without seeking profit. Participants further define social entrepreneurship as a concept that develops individuals, reconciles them with their environment, eliminates shyness in social settings, and activates the individual. Moreover, social entrepreneurship is seen as any initiative undertaken by an individual to find solutions to social problems, eliminate or resolve those issues, and transform the current situation without expecting financial gain.

Dimension II: Findings on the importance of community service projects.

The second dimension of the research was developed to reveal findings on the importance of community service projects based on stakeholders' opinions. In this context, 180 participants provided their feedback. The responses were coded, themes were identified, and the distributions of these themes are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Findings on the importance of community service projects.

Category	Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Thoughts on the findings regarding the importance of community service projects according to stakeholders' views	It is important for the solidarity of society and its people; it is essential for the needs, development, and change of society.	170	94%
	Supports social justice, increases social welfare, strengthens social solidarity, and provides support in times of crisis.	142	78%
	It is important for ensuring social development and sociological progress by facilitating social transformation. It also strengthens bonds of solidarity and love by helping people unite for a peaceful and happy life, serving as a guarantee for the future.	128	71%
	Community service projects enhance societal welfare by addressing social issues and fostering sensitivity and responsibility in individuals. They improve the overall well-being of society and enable youth to participate in future initiatives.	151	83%

According to the stakeholders' views, some of the participants' opinions regarding the findings on the importance of community service projects are as follows.

K(89)“In my opinion, community service projects increase the welfare of the society by solving social problems and I think that they create sensitivity and sense of responsibility in individuals, increase the welfare level of the society and contribute to the projects of the young generation for the future.”

K(121)“In my opinion, it is very important for ensuring social development and ensuring sociological progress by ensuring social transformation, it is the guarantee of the future and for people to live a peaceful and happy life.”

According to the stakeholders' views and participant opinions regarding the findings on the importance of community service projects, participants stated that these projects are vital for societal solidarity and for addressing societal needs, development, and change. Additionally, they emphasized that social entrepreneurship supports social justice, enhances social welfare, and strengthens social solidarity. It also provides significant support, especially during times of crisis. Furthermore, participants believe that social development is achieved through social entrepreneurship and that fostering social transformation is essential for sociological progress. They highlighted that social entrepreneurship is crucial for ensuring a better future, promoting peace, and strengthening bonds of solidarity and love through collaborative efforts for a happy life. Moreover, community service projects contribute to increasing societal welfare by solving social problems and play an important role in developing sensitivity and responsibility awareness among individuals. Participants suggested that the overall welfare of society improves through social entrepreneurship and that such practices should be integrated into education to enable the youth to contribute to future projects.

Dimension III: Findings on which projects should be carried out toward sustainable development goals.

The third dimension of the research was developed to reveal findings on which projects should be carried out to achieve sustainable development goals, based on stakeholders' views. In this context, 180 participants were asked for their opinions. The answers given to these questions were coded and themes were extracted and the distributions regarding these themes are given in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Findings on which projects should be carried out towards sustainable development goals.

Category	Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Thoughts on which projects should be carried out towards sustainable development goals according to the views of stakeholders.	Carrying out sustainable projects in the fields of economy and education.	114	63%
	Carrying out recycling and waste recovery projects.	125	68%
	Carrying out projects such as renewable energy, water conservation, public transportation incentives, and initiatives in the technology, health, and industry sectors.	96	53%
	To produce projects for quality education, to create projects for quality education, to form the basis of social development, and to create qualified individuals and societies.	161	79%

According to the stakeholders' views, some of the participants' opinions are as follows regarding the presentation of findings within the scope of projects that should be carried out toward sustainable development goals.

K (70) "In my opinion, I think that projects should be produced for qualified education, the basis of social development and projects should be produced for qualified education in order to create qualified individuals and societies."

K (121) "In my opinion, I think that more importance should be given to social entrepreneurship in terms of carrying out projects such as renewable energy, water saving, public transportation incentives, and projects in the technology, health and industry sectors."

According to the participants' views, in terms of presenting the findings within the scope of projects that should be carried out towards sustainable development goals, it can be said that sustainable projects should be implemented especially in the economic and educational fields. In addition, the participants stated that recycling and waste management projects should also be undertaken.

They expressed that priority should be given to projects such as renewable energy, water conservation, and public transportation incentives. Furthermore, the participants emphasized the importance of giving more attention to projects in the technology, health, and industry sectors.

Additionally, it is understood from the participants' views that emphasis should be placed on developing projects for quality education, particularly to establish a foundation for social development and to create qualified individuals and society.

Dimension IV: Findings on acquiring social entrepreneurship skills through community service projects.

The fourth dimension of the research is acquiring social entrepreneurship skills through community service projects according to the opinions of stakeholders. The answers given to these questions are given in [Table 4](#).

According to the views of the stakeholders, some of the participants' opinions are as follows.

K (23) "In my opinion, community service projects should provide social entrepreneurship skills, make people realize social problems, think solution-oriented, develop innovative projects and produce sustainable solutions."

K (178) "In my opinion, I think that they provide benefits for reducing poverty, and offer competitive advantage to individuals of developing societies with innovation and creativity."

Table 4. Findings on acquiring social entrepreneurship skills through community service projects.

Category	Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Thoughts on the findings regarding the acquisition of social entrepreneurship skills through community service projects according to the views of stakeholders.	Projects also promote social activity and togetherness, and foster entrepreneurship, as service projects require communication and cooperation among people.	115	63%
	It enables cooperation, empathy, perspective-taking, a better life, and makes individuals more sensitive to social issues.	101	56%
	Providing benefits for poverty reduction and offering a competitive advantage to individuals in developing societies through innovation and creativity.	110	61%
	Community service projects provide social entrepreneurship skills, enable individuals to recognize social problems, think in a solution-oriented manner, develop innovative projects, and produce sustainable solutions.	149	82%

According to the views of the stakeholders, in the context of community service projects, participants stated that the projects provide social activity and promote togetherness. Additionally, since community service projects require communication and cooperation among people, participants indicated that they develop entrepreneurial skills. Furthermore, thanks to community service projects, social entrepreneurship skills are enhanced, including helping others, empathizing, perspective-taking, and sustaining life better within the scope of social entrepreneurship. As a result of community service practices, it can be said that individuals become more sensitive to social problems, according to participant views. It is understood from the participants' perspectives that these projects offer significant benefits, particularly in reducing poverty, alongside the increase in social entrepreneurship skills. Moreover, participants believe that community service projects provide a competitive advantage to individuals in developing societies through innovation and creativity. It can be concluded that community service projects fostering social entrepreneurship skills enable better recognition of social problems, and individuals with these skills tend to adopt more solution-oriented approaches. Additionally, participants suggest that innovative projects can be developed more effectively, contributing significantly to sustainable solutions and the development of social entrepreneurship skills through community service practices.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the research were analyzed to answer each research question, and the outcomes of these analyses are presented below in order.

Dimension I: Results on how the concept of social entrepreneurship is defined.

According to the participants' opinions, social entrepreneurship significantly contributes to the development of individuals' sense of responsibility and sensitivity, based on their views and thoughts on how stakeholders define the concept of social entrepreneurship. This finding aligns with the results of Çelik (2019). Additionally, participants believe that social entrepreneurship enables individuals to be active in social environments without feeling shy. The participants define entrepreneurship as an individual's aim to generate profit in any field and to achieve the best possible outcome. It can be said that social entrepreneurship is also described as individuals' efforts to ensure that everyone has access to resources and opportunities, without prioritizing personal rights and profit goals above social norms, and aiming for development without compromising people's welfare, peace, and health, thereby maintaining social balance and profit. These results are similar to the results of Çolakoğlu and Çolakoğlu (2016). We observe that social entrepreneurship is also defined by participants as a concept that develops individuals, reconciles them with the environment, eliminates shyness in social settings, and activates the individual. Additionally, social entrepreneurship is described by participants as any initiative undertaken by an

individual to find solutions to social problems, eliminate or resolve those issues, and transform the current situation without expecting material benefits. This finding aligns with the results of Çiftçi (2010).

Dimension II: Findings regarding the importance of community service projects.

According to the views of the stakeholders, regarding the results related to the importance of community service projects, the participants stated that they are important for societal solidarity and for addressing the needs, development, and change within society. Additionally, the participants mentioned that these projects support social justice, enhance social welfare, strengthen social solidarity, and that social entrepreneurship provides significant support, especially during times of crisis, emphasizing the importance of social entrepreneurship. These results are similar to the results of Deveci et al. (2015). In addition, we can say that social development is achieved through social entrepreneurship, which is important for ensuring sociological progress by facilitating social transformation. The participants stated that social entrepreneurship is very important for securing the future, promoting peace, and strengthening bonds of solidarity and love by working together for a happy life. These results are consistent with the findings of Kaya (2018b). Additionally, according to the participants' views, community service projects enhance societal welfare by addressing social issues and significantly contribute to fostering sensitivity and a sense of responsibility among individuals. The participants suggested that social entrepreneurship increases the overall welfare of society and that social entrepreneurship practices should be emphasized in education to enable youth to contribute to future initiatives. These results are parallel and overlap with the results of Koçak and Özdemir (2015).

Dimension III: Findings on which projects should be carried out toward sustainable development goals.

According to the views of the stakeholders, it can be said that sustainable projects should be carried out in the economic and educational fields, especially in terms of revealing the results within the scope of which projects should be undertaken to achieve sustainable development goals. In addition, the participants stated that recycling and waste management projects should be implemented. These results are similar to and overlap with the results of Meydanoğlu (2019). The participants expressed their views, emphasizing that priority should be given to projects such as renewable energy, water conservation, and public transportation incentives. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of focusing more on projects in the technology, health, and industry sectors. These results are parallel with the results of Müftügil (2021). In addition, it is understood from the participant views that projects that will be produced especially for the sake of qualified education should be carried out, and that emphasis should be given to the production of projects for the sake of qualified education in order to create the basis of social development and qualified individuals and societies. These results overlap with the results of Pan and Akay (2015).

Dimension IV: Findings on acquiring social entrepreneurship skills through community service projects.

According to the views of the stakeholders, community service projects can provide results aimed at developing social entrepreneurship skills. Participants also stated that these projects promote social activity and foster a sense of togetherness. Additionally, since community service projects require communication and cooperation among individuals, participants noted that they help develop entrepreneurial skills. These findings align with those of Polat (2020) and show similarities. Furthermore, participants indicated that community service projects enhance social entrepreneurship skills, such as helping others, empathizing, perspective-taking, and sustaining life better within the scope of social entrepreneurship. According to participants, engaging in community service practices can increase individuals' sensitivity to social problems. These results show similarities with the results of Sahap (2020). It is understood from the participants' views that it provides significant benefits, especially with the increase in social entrepreneurship skills, in terms of reducing poverty. Additionally, it is understood from the participants' views that it offers a competitive advantage to individuals in developing societies through innovation and creativity. According to the participants' views, we can say that social problems can be better recognized within the scope of community service projects that provide social entrepreneurship skills, and individuals who gain these skills can think more solution-oriented. These results are consistent with the results of Sentürk and Mengü (2020). In addition, according to participants' views, it can be said that especially innovative projects can be developed further

and contribute significantly to the production of sustainable solutions in terms of developing social entrepreneurship skills through community service practices. These results are consistent with the results of Yıldırım and Tuncay (2019) and show parallels.

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Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement: Upon a reasonable request, the supporting data of this study can be provided by the corresponding author.

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