



Social Entrepreneurship Education and Students' Social Entrepreneurial Intentions: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in Mongolia

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship education has increasingly been promoted as a strategic approach to addressing social and economic challenges, particularly in developing-country contexts. However, empirical evidence explaining how such education translates into students' intentions to engage in social entrepreneurship remains limited in the Global South. This study examined the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention, with entrepreneurial self-efficacy serving as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 397 undergraduate students enrolled in five national universities in Mongolia. The data were analyzed using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) to test the proposed relationships. The results indicated that social entrepreneurship education had a positive but relatively modest direct effect on social entrepreneurial intention, while entrepreneurial self-efficacy showed a strong and significant influence on intention. Moreover, entrepreneurial self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention, suggesting that education primarily shaped intention by strengthening students' confidence in their entrepreneurial capabilities. These findings highlighted the importance of psychological empowerment in transforming educational exposure into entrepreneurial motivation. This study contributes to the social entrepreneurship literature by providing empirical evidence from an underexplored Global South context and offers practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to design more effective social entrepreneurship education programs.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship education; Entrepreneurial self-efficacy; Entrepreneurial intention; Higher education.

A. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a fundamental driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment across both developed and developing economies (Värlander et al., 2020; Adeniyi, 2023). In many emerging economies, entrepreneurship is increasingly positioned not only as an engine of economic expansion but also as a strategic instrument for addressing structural socioeconomic challenges. In Mongolia, rapid economic transformations in sectors such as banking, telecommunications, and retail highlight the growing relevance of entrepreneurial activity in shaping national development trajectories. However, contemporary entrepreneurial discourse has moved beyond purely economic objectives, emphasizing the broader societal responsibilities of business actors. This shift has given rise to social entrepreneurship, a form of entrepreneurship that integrates business principles with solutions to pressing social and environmental problems (Short et al., 2009; Al-Qudah et al., 2022).

Social entrepreneurship represents a transformative approach that places social value creation alongside financial sustainability. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which prioritizes profit maximization, social entrepreneurship emphasizes social impact, innovation, and long-term community benefits (Short et al., 2009; Badrudin et al., 2021; Jarrar, 2022). Social entrepreneurs function as change agents who address systemic social issues, foster inclusive development, and inspire collective engagement within communities (Sroka & Meyer, 2021; Nasrudin, M., et al., 2025). Their initiatives contribute not only to immediate problem-solving but also to sustained improvements in quality of life, social well-being, and sustainable development outcomes. As global awareness of social and environmental challenges intensifies, social entrepreneurship has increasingly been viewed as a viable pathway for balancing economic growth with societal responsibility.

The expansion of social entrepreneurship is closely linked to rising expectations from consumers, investors, and policymakers regarding ethical conduct, sustainability, and social accountability. Growing demand for socially responsible practices has created new opportunities for social enterprises to scale their impact and influence policy and market structures (Teles & Schachtebeck, 2019; Kickul & Lyons, 2020; Pranajaya, S. A., 2024). By leveraging creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial competencies, social entrepreneurs address unmet social needs, reduce unemployment, and stimulate inclusive economic development (Chaudry, 2023). Consequently, governments and higher education institutions worldwide have increasingly

promoted social entrepreneurship as a strategic response to complex social challenges, positioning education as a critical mechanism for cultivating socially oriented entrepreneurial capacities.

Despite this growing global emphasis, empirical research on social entrepreneurship remains unevenly distributed, with a marked concentration in developed economies. Evidence from the Global South, including Mongolia, remains limited and fragmented (MMCG, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). In particular, while prior studies have established conceptual links between entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention (Wardana et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023; Rizka et al., 2025), there is insufficient empirical understanding of how these relationships operate within developing-country contexts. Educational systems, institutional support, and socio-cultural conditions in countries such as Mongolia differ substantially from those in Western settings, potentially shaping entrepreneurial outcomes in distinct ways. As a result, the mechanisms through which social entrepreneurship education translates into students' intentions to pursue social ventures remain underexplored.

Existing literature suggests that universities play a central role in fostering entrepreneurial competencies aligned with sustainable development goals by nurturing creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills among students (García-González & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021). In response to societal challenges, traditional entrepreneurship education has evolved into social entrepreneurship education, which integrates business knowledge with social mission orientation (Tan et al., 2020; Sidharta et al., 2023). Through experiential learning, real-world engagement, and collaborative problem-solving, social entrepreneurship education encourages students to co-create innovative solutions to social problems, equipping them with both technical skills and a sense of social responsibility (Kummitha & Kummitha, 2021; Utomo et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence explaining how such educational interventions shape social entrepreneurial intention in developing contexts remains scarce, particularly regarding the psychological processes that connect education to intention.

Social entrepreneurial intention represents an individual's commitment and motivation to establish ventures aimed at addressing societal challenges (Chhabra et al., 2020). It reflects a cognitive and affective orientation that drives individuals to generate socially innovative ideas and pursue entrepreneurial pathways that prioritize collective well-being. While social entrepreneurship has attracted increasing

scholarly attention due to its potential to generate both social and economic value (Mair & Martí, 2006; Utomo et al., 2022), much of the existing research has focused on developed economies, leaving developing contexts underrepresented. Moreover, although intention has been widely acknowledged as a key predictor of entrepreneurial behavior, the psychological foundations of social entrepreneurial intention—particularly the role of self-belief and perceived capability—have not been sufficiently examined in settings such as Mongolia (Bacq & Alt, 2018; Zhang et al., 2021; Younis et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, originally conceptualized by Bandura as an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks successfully, has emerged as a critical determinant of entrepreneurial intention (Wu et al., 2022). In the entrepreneurial domain, self-efficacy reflects confidence in performing entrepreneurial roles, managing uncertainty, and overcoming challenges associated with venture creation (McGee et al., 2009; Schjoedt & Craig, 2017). Individuals with high levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to perceive entrepreneurial activities as feasible and to persist in the face of obstacles. Although previous studies have demonstrated positive relationships between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention (Hou et al., 2019; Schmutzler et al., 2019; Doan & Viet, 2023), the mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy—particularly in the context of social entrepreneurship education—remains insufficiently examined in developing economies.

Recent studies suggest that entrepreneurship education can significantly influence entrepreneurial intention indirectly by enhancing students' self-efficacy (Wardana et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). In social entrepreneurship contexts, educational experiences that emphasize experiential learning, community engagement, and social problem-solving may be especially effective in strengthening students' confidence to initiate social ventures (Yu et al., 2021; Kim, 2022). However, empirical investigations that explicitly test this mediating mechanism within the Global South are still limited. This gap is particularly evident in Mongolia, where institutional support structures for social entrepreneurship are still evolving and where the effectiveness of educational interventions remains underexplored (MMCG, 2022).

Addressing these limitations, the present study examines the mediating role of social entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention among Mongolian university students. By integrating perspectives from education, psychology, and social development, this study advances existing literature by empirically clarifying how educational interventions foster

socially oriented entrepreneurial behavior in a developing-country context. The novelty of this research lies in its explicit focus on the psychological mechanism of self-efficacy as a mediating factor within social entrepreneurship education, as well as its empirical contribution from an underrepresented Global South setting. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer how social entrepreneurship education influences students' self-efficacy and social entrepreneurial intention, whether entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates this relationship, and how these dynamics contribute to the development of socially conscious entrepreneurial capacities in Mongolia.

B. Method

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention, with entrepreneurial self-efficacy functioning as a mediating variable. The quantitative approach was selected to enable the statistical testing of theoretically derived relationships among latent constructs and to estimate the magnitude and direction of structural paths within the proposed model. Data were collected at a single point in time to capture students' perceptions, beliefs, and intentions regarding social entrepreneurship education and related psychological outcomes.

The study population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled at five national universities in Mongolia. Data collection was conducted between October 2, 2023, and December 18, 2023, using an online questionnaire administered through Microsoft Forms. The survey was distributed to approximately 15,250 bachelor's students across the participating universities. Based on established sample size recommendations for structural equation modeling, a minimum of 375 respondents was determined to be sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error and to meet analytical requirements (Hair et al., 2014). A total of 415 responses were initially obtained. After excluding 18 responses due to incomplete data and response patterns indicating insufficient attention, such as straight-line answering, the final analytical sample comprised 397 students, exceeding the minimum threshold and providing adequate statistical power for subsequent analyses.

The study utilized a self-administered questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Social entrepreneurship education was measured using four items adapted from Hassan et al. (2022). Social entrepreneurial intention

was assessed using a three-item scale developed by Hockerts (2017), while entrepreneurial self-efficacy was measured using a three-item scale from the same source. To ensure linguistic accuracy and semantic equivalence, the questionnaire was translated into Mongolian using a back-translation procedure. A pilot test involving 30 students confirmed the clarity and comprehensibility of all items, and no substantive revisions were required prior to the main data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 23.0 for preliminary data screening and descriptive analysis, and SmartPLS version 4.0.9.8 for structural equation modeling. Reliability and validity assessments were performed to evaluate the measurement properties of the constructs, followed by structural model estimation to examine the hypothesized relationships among variables. This analytical procedure enabled the simultaneous assessment of measurement quality and structural paths in accordance with the objectives of the study.

In line with the theoretical framework and research objectives, four hypotheses were tested: the positive relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention (H1), the positive relationship between social entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (H2), the positive relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and social entrepreneurial intention (H3), and the mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention (H4).

This research adhered to internationally recognized ethical standards for social research. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were informed about the voluntary nature of the study, its purpose, and the use of the data for academic research. No personally identifiable information was collected, and participant anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings of the study regarding changes in student satisfaction before and after the implementation of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum, supported by e-learning, at Universitas Alma Ata (UAA), Indonesia, and Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Thailand. The results are organized in three sections: first, to describe overall patterns of student satisfaction, followed by inferential analyses of pretest-posttest differences, and finally, a dimensional breakdown of satisfaction

indicators. All findings are reported descriptively and statistically in accordance with the research design, without interpretative or theoretical elaboration, to provide a clear empirical basis for subsequent discussion.

1. Results

a. Demographic Indicators:

The final analytical sample comprised 397 undergraduate students from five universities in Mongolia. Table 1 presents the demographic composition of the sample.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	243	61.2
	Male	154	38.8
Academic Year	First-year	144	36.3
	Second-year	114	28.7
	Third-year	81	20.4
	Fourth-year	44	11.1
	Fifth year	14	3.5
Field of Study	Business & Economics	125	31.5
	Social Sciences	86	21.7
	Humanities	82	20.7
	Educational Sciences	44	11.1
	Medical Sciences	28	7.1
	Law	21	5.3
Employment Status	IT & Technology	11	2.8
	Unemployed	313	78.8
	Part-time employed	84	21.2

Source: author's work.

Among the respondents, 61.2% were female and 38.8% were male. Regarding academic year, 36.3% were first-year students, 28.7% were second-year, 20.4% were third-year, 11.1% were fourth-year, and 3.5% were fifth-year students. Regarding their fields of study, 31.5% were pursuing business and economics, 21.7% were in social sciences, 20.7% in humanities, 11.1% in educational sciences, 7.1% in medical sciences, 5.3% in law, and 2.8% in IT and technology. Notably, 78.8% of respondents reported being unemployed, while the remaining 21.2% were employed part-time, primarily in the service sector.

Measurement model: An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the correlation coefficients between items and latent variables. Additionally, tests for internal consistency and reliability were performed, which included calculating

Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The results, presented in Table 2, illustrate the reliability and underlying relationships among the measures. The analysis indicated strong consistency and reliability across all factors and associated measurement variables.

Specifically, the internal consistency values ranged from 0.728 to 0.893, reflecting good consistency among the questionnaire items used to assess each factor. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.841 to 0.869, exceeding the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 for adequate reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Composite reliability scores varied from 0.842 to 0.871, surpassing the recommended guideline of 0.70 for acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2014). Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) results ranged from 0.575 to 0.695, exceeding the 0.50 threshold (Awang, 2014). These findings indicate that a satisfactory amount of variance is explained by the constructs, demonstrating notable practical significance and the ability to differentiate between factors effectively.

Table 2. Outcomes of the variable's reliability analysis

Variables	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Social Entrepreneurship Education -SEE	4	0.728-0.819	.841	.842	.575
Social Entrepreneurial Intention-SEI	3	0.791-0.836	.849	.849	.652
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy-ESE	3	0.774-0.893	.869	.871	.695

Source: author's work.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which compares the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values with the inter-construct correlations, as presented in Table 3. For each latent construct, the diagonal values representing the square root of the AVEs were found to be higher than the correlations between the different constructs. This finding indicates that the model demonstrates satisfactory discriminant validity (Gujarati & Porter, 2003).

Table 3. Results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity

Variables	Mean	SEE	SEI	ESE
Social Entrepreneurship Education -SEE	4.1828	(0.759)		
Social Entrepreneurial Intention-SEI	4.3442	0.461	(0.807)	
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy-ESE	4.3093	0.424	0.679	(0.834)

***Significant at the 0.001 level, **significant at the 0.01 level, * and significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: author's work.

b. Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM)

We employed Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM). During the analysis, we examined the correlations between the independent and dependent variables. The findings confirmed all three assumptions, with every regression weight being positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The results of the survey are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Result
H1	SEE \rightarrow SEI	0.261	0.070	3.729	<.001	[0.124, 0.398]	Supported
H2	SEE \rightarrow ESE	0.450	0.064	7.026	<.001	[0.325, 0.575]	Supported
H3	ESE \rightarrow SEI	0.685	0.067	9.805	<.001	[0.548, 0.822]	Supported

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; all significance tests are two-tailed; confidence intervals derived from 5,000 bootstrap samples

Variable definition: SEE, Social Entrepreneurship Education; SEI, Social Entrepreneurial Intention; ESE, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy;

Source: author's work.

After confirming the measurement model's validity and reliability, we employed the PLS and Bootstrapping algorithms in PLS version 4.0.9.8 to test the proposed associations.

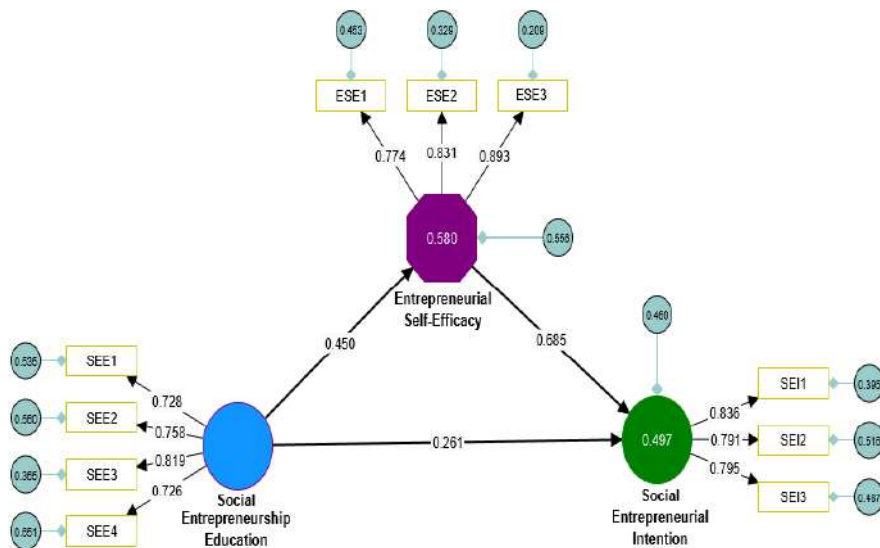


Figure 1. Covariance-based Structural Equation Model

The study's findings supported all research hypotheses regarding the direct relationships between social entrepreneurship education (SEE), social entrepreneurial intention (SEI), and self-efficacy (ESE), as illustrated in Figure 1 and detailed in Table 4.

The analysis revealed that social entrepreneurship education positively and moderately influences participants' entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.450$) and has a positive but weak effect on their social entrepreneurial intention ($\beta = 0.261$). Furthermore, the results indicated that entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.685$) has a strong positive impact on social entrepreneurial intention. Since the effects of the related regulatory factors (beta coefficients) were all positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$), all of the study's hypotheses were supported.

Additionally, we aimed to investigate the mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the relationship between social entrepreneurship education (SEE) and social entrepreneurial intention (SEI). The results of the mediation analysis, presented in Table 5, demonstrate a significant mediating influence of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, with a total mediation effect value of 0.569. The SEE \rightarrow ESE \rightarrow SEI pathway shows an indirect impact value of 0.308. Notably, the 95% confidence interval, determined through the Bootstrap method, does not include zero within its upper or lower bounds. These findings indicate a strong mediating effect of students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy on the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention, thereby confirming hypothesis H4.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
H4	SEE \rightarrow ESE \rightarrow SEI	0.261***	0.308***	0.569***

Note: *** $p < .001$; bootstrap confidence intervals (95%) for indirect effect: [0.198, 0.428]; all effects are standardized coefficients

Source: author's work.

Our study confirmed all four hypotheses, as the effects of the associated independent variables were found to be positive and statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that social entrepreneurship education contributes positively to students' social entrepreneurial intention, although the magnitude of this direct effect is relatively modest. The positive

association between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention supports the view that educational exposure plays an important role in shaping students' awareness of social problems, attitudes toward socially oriented ventures, and interest in entrepreneurial careers (Hayati & Mayasari, 2019; Akhter et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2022). However, the modest size of the direct effect suggests that education alone is insufficient to generate strong and sustained intentions to engage in social entrepreneurship. This finding advances existing scholarship by demonstrating that while curricula and formal instruction introduce foundational knowledge and normative orientations, they do not automatically translate into high levels of entrepreneurial commitment unless supported by complementary psychological mechanisms.

From an educational perspective, this result highlights a critical distinction between exposure and internalization. Social entrepreneurship education in universities typically provides students with conceptual frameworks, case studies, and awareness of social challenges, thereby shaping cognitive understanding and normative values. Nevertheless, the transition from understanding social problems to committing to address them through entrepreneurial action requires more than cognitive acquisition. The Mongolian context illustrates this dynamic clearly. Although students are increasingly exposed to social entrepreneurship concepts through university programs, structural uncertainty, limited entrepreneurial ecosystems, and emerging institutional support may temper their willingness to translate knowledge into action. The findings therefore reinforce arguments in the literature that education must be designed not only to transmit knowledge but also to strengthen students' sense of agency and perceived feasibility of entrepreneurial action (Wardana et al., 2020).

The study further demonstrates that social entrepreneurship education exerts a substantial and positive influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy. The relatively strong path coefficient between education and self-efficacy confirms that structured educational interventions can meaningfully enhance students' confidence in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks and address social challenges. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of experiential learning, project-based activities, and practical engagement in fostering entrepreneurial capabilities (Wardana et al., 2020; Yeh et al., 2021). By engaging students in simulations, group projects, and problem-solving exercises, social entrepreneurship education provides opportunities for enactive mastery experiences, which are widely recognized as the most powerful source of self-efficacy development.



In the Mongolian higher education context, this result carries particular significance. As social entrepreneurship remains an emerging field, students may possess strong awareness of social issues but lack confidence in their capacity to intervene effectively. The finding that education significantly strengthens entrepreneurial self-efficacy suggests that universities can play a transformative role by creating learning environments that reduce perceived risk and uncertainty. Through carefully designed curricula that integrate practice-oriented components, students are able to test their skills, experience incremental successes, and develop confidence in their entrepreneurial competence. This underscores the importance of moving beyond purely theoretical instruction toward pedagogical models that prioritize experiential learning and applied problem-solving.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, in turn, emerges as a powerful predictor of social entrepreneurial intention, exhibiting the strongest effect among all relationships tested in the model. The strong association between self-efficacy and intention reinforces extensive evidence indicating that individuals who believe in their ability to perform entrepreneurial roles are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial pathways (Wijangga & Sanjaya, 2019; Kim, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). In the context of social entrepreneurship, this relationship is particularly salient because social ventures often involve heightened uncertainty, resource constraints, and complex social dynamics. Confidence in one's capacity to navigate these challenges therefore becomes a decisive factor in motivating entrepreneurial action.

The present findings extend existing literature by demonstrating that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is not merely an auxiliary outcome of education but a central mechanism through which educational interventions influence social entrepreneurial intention. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to perceive social entrepreneurship as a feasible and achievable career option, rather than an idealistic but impractical aspiration. This insight is especially relevant for developing countries such as Mongolia, where social problems are visible but institutional pathways for addressing them through entrepreneurship are still evolving. By strengthening students' belief in their own capabilities, universities can help bridge the gap between social awareness and entrepreneurial action, thereby fostering a new generation of socially oriented change agents.

The mediation analysis provides one of the most important contributions of this study. The results demonstrate that entrepreneurial self-efficacy partially

mediates the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention, indicating that much of education's influence operates indirectly through psychological empowerment rather than directly through knowledge transmission alone. The substantial indirect effect, combined with a reduced but still significant direct effect, suggests that education influences intention through multiple pathways. While educational exposure may directly shape values, norms, and awareness of social entrepreneurship, its most potent impact occurs when it enhances students' confidence in their ability to act.

This finding offers a nuanced understanding of how social entrepreneurship education functions in practice. Rather than viewing education as a linear driver of intention, the results highlight a layered process in which educational experiences first shape self-beliefs, which then translate into entrepreneurial motivation. This mechanism aligns with recent studies emphasizing the mediating role of self-efficacy in entrepreneurship education contexts (Younis et al., 2021; Kim, 2022; Wu et al., 2022), but the present study extends this line of inquiry by focusing explicitly on social entrepreneurship and by providing empirical evidence from an underrepresented Global South context. In doing so, it demonstrates that the psychological processes linking education and intention are not confined to Western or highly developed entrepreneurial ecosystems, but also operate in transitional economies such as Mongolia.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative examination of social entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and social entrepreneurial intention within a single empirical framework, empirically tested in a developing-country context. While previous studies have often explored these constructs separately or focused predominantly on developed economies (Mair & Martí, 2006; Tan et al., 2020), this research advances the literature by positioning entrepreneurial self-efficacy as a central mediating mechanism through which social entrepreneurship education shapes students' intentions (Wardana et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). By empirically validating this mechanism among Mongolian university students, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how educational interventions translate into entrepreneurial motivation in contexts characterized by evolving institutional support and emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems (Hassan et al., 2022; Kim, 2022). In doing so, the study not only reinforces established theoretical assumptions but also extends their applicability to social entrepreneurship, an area where empirical evidence from the Global South remains comparatively limited (Salamzadeh et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2023).

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings strengthen the centrality of self-efficacy in models of entrepreneurial intention and demonstrate its relevance beyond conventional profit-oriented entrepreneurship (McGee et al., 2009; Schmutzler et al., 2019). Consistent with social cognitive theory, the results suggest that individuals' beliefs in their own entrepreneurial capabilities serve as a critical cognitive filter through which educational inputs are interpreted and transformed into intention (Bandura, as operationalized in Wu et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2019). In the context of social entrepreneurship, where uncertainty, moral commitment, and resource constraints are often more pronounced than in commercial ventures, self-efficacy becomes even more salient as a determinant of perceived feasibility and personal agency (Bacq & Alt, 2018; Kim, 2022). By empirically confirming the mediating role of self-efficacy, this study bridges entrepreneurship education literature with psychological perspectives, offering a more integrative explanatory model that captures both structural and individual-level dynamics (Wardana et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022).

Practically, the findings offer evidence-based guidance for educators and policymakers seeking to design more effective social entrepreneurship education programs. Rather than treating education as a direct catalyst of entrepreneurial intention, the results highlight the importance of embedding pedagogical approaches that explicitly aim to strengthen students' confidence, competence, and sense of agency (Yeh et al., 2021; Kummitha & Kummitha, 2021). This implies that curricular success should not be evaluated solely based on content coverage or exposure to social entrepreneurship concepts, but also on the extent to which educational experiences enable students to internalize entrepreneurial capabilities and perceive social venture creation as an attainable pathway (Akhter et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). Such insights are particularly relevant for higher education institutions in developing countries, where students may face heightened uncertainty regarding career prospects and institutional support, and where education plays a strategic role in compensating for limited entrepreneurial ecosystems (Salamzadeh et al., 2013; MMCG, 2022).

Beyond its local contribution, the study carries important global implications, especially for countries in the Global South that increasingly position social entrepreneurship as a strategic response to persistent social inequality, unemployment, and sustainable development challenges. As noted in prior studies, social entrepreneurship has gained global relevance precisely because it integrates market-based mechanisms with social value creation, making it especially attractive

in contexts where state capacity and formal welfare systems are limited (Mair & Martí, 2006; Tan et al., 2020; Younis et al., 2021). In such settings, social entrepreneurs often fill institutional gaps by addressing unmet social needs through innovative and locally embedded solutions. The present findings contribute to this global discourse by demonstrating that the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship education does not rest merely on curricular inclusion, but on its capacity to activate key psychological mechanisms that enable individuals to envision themselves as capable social change agents.

Specifically, the results underscore that social entrepreneurship education becomes impactful when it strengthens entrepreneurial self-efficacy, thereby enabling learners to internalize competencies and perceive entrepreneurial action as both feasible and meaningful. This finding aligns with earlier arguments that education exerts its strongest influence not through knowledge transmission alone, but through the cultivation of self-belief and perceived behavioral control (Wardana et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). Although institutional environments, cultural norms, and levels of economic development vary considerably across countries, the underlying psychological process linking education, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention appears to be robust and transferable. In this sense, the Mongolian case provides valuable empirical evidence from an underrepresented context, enriching global debates on entrepreneurship education by illustrating how similar cognitive mechanisms operate beyond Western or highly developed entrepreneurial ecosystems (Hassan et al., 2022; Kim, 2022).

At the same time, the findings caution against overly optimistic assumptions regarding the direct impact of social entrepreneurship education on students' intentions. The relatively modest direct effect observed in this study reinforces the argument that education alone is insufficient to generate strong entrepreneurial commitment. Consistent with prior research, educational programs that focus predominantly on knowledge acquisition may increase awareness and shape favorable attitudes, but they are less effective in motivating action unless complemented by experiential learning, mentorship, and opportunities for enactive mastery that actively strengthen self-efficacy (Akhter et al., 2020; Yeh et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). This distinction is crucial for policymakers and university leaders who often equate the expansion of entrepreneurship courses with tangible entrepreneurial outcomes, without sufficient attention to how these courses are designed and implemented.

For universities and policymakers worldwide, these findings imply that investments in social entrepreneurship education should be embedded within broader institutional ecosystems that provide sustained and structured support. Such ecosystems may include incubation programs, mentoring by experienced entrepreneurs, access to networks and funding opportunities, and structured platforms for real-world engagement. By aligning curricular content with psychological empowerment and institutional facilitation, higher education institutions can move beyond symbolic commitments to social entrepreneurship and instead play a substantive role in cultivating socially oriented entrepreneurs capable of translating intention into action at scale (Nguyen et al., 2023; Younis et al., 2021). In this way, social entrepreneurship education can function not merely as an academic initiative, but as a strategic instrument for long-term social and economic transformation.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships among social entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and social entrepreneurial intention. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to examine how these relationships evolve over time and whether educational interventions have sustained effects on entrepreneurial behavior. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce common method bias and social desirability effects, although established measurement scales and statistical procedures were employed to mitigate these risks. Third, the study focuses on undergraduate students from national universities in Mongolia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational levels, institutional types, or cultural contexts. Future research could extend this model to different populations and settings to further validate and refine the proposed relationships.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social entrepreneurship education influences students' social entrepreneurial intentions primarily through the enhancement of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Although education has a direct effect on intention, its impact is strongest when it builds students' confidence to identify social problems and implement viable solutions, highlighting self-efficacy as a key mechanism translating learning into entrepreneurial motivation in developing-country contexts.

The findings contribute theoretically by refining entrepreneurship education models to emphasize internal cognitive and motivational processes, and practically by underscoring the need for experiential, confidence-building approaches within supportive institutional environments. By doing so, higher education institutions can more effectively prepare socially aware and capable graduates who are able to convert entrepreneurial intentions into meaningful and sustainable social impact.

Building on the limitations identified in the discussion, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how the relationships among social entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and social entrepreneurial intention evolve over time. Further studies could also extend this model to different educational levels, institutional contexts, and cultural settings to assess the robustness and generalizability of the proposed relationships. Such efforts would deepen understanding of how educational systems can systematically cultivate socially responsible entrepreneurs capable of generating sustained social impact.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that social entrepreneurship education is most effective when it strengthens students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, enabling the transformation of social awareness into concrete entrepreneurial intention. The findings highlight that cultivating competence, confidence, and commitment is essential for higher education institutions seeking to prepare graduates who can translate social ideals into sustainable entrepreneurial action, particularly in emerging and resource-constrained contexts.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.



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