Catalyst Now
For the world's social innovators

BRIDGING PURPOSE AND PRACTICE:
KEY COMPETENCIES FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION EDUCATION

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About the Cover

This report is inspired by the need to shape a more holistic approach to social innovation education, one that balances inner competencies like empathy and self-awareness with outer skills such as systems thinking and business acumen, fostering the full spectrum of human and technical skills needed to lead lasting social impact.

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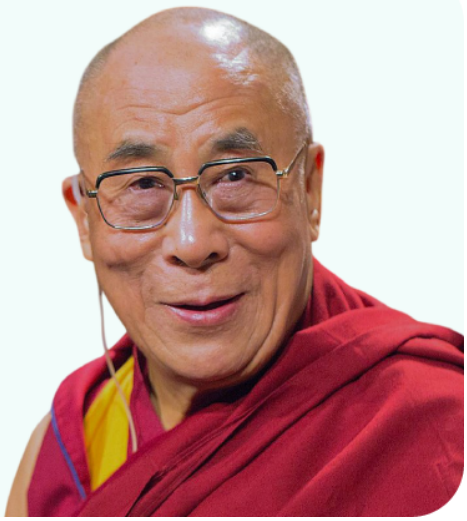
*"When **educating the minds** of our youth, we **must not forget** to educate **their hearts.**"*

- Dalai Lama



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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

This report was inspired by the need to shape a more holistic approach to social innovation education, one that balances inner competencies like empathy and self-awareness with outer skills such as systems thinking and business acumen, fostering the full spectrum of human and technical skills needed to lead lasting social impact. Together, these threads form the foundation of a more complete educational tapestry; one that prepares students to lead lasting social change with both heart and a strategic mindset.

This is the first phase of a broader research project on the teaching, learning, and practice of social innovation, we begin to weave the complex and colorful threads of Social Innovation Education (SIE) into a coherent framework. The project aims to offer a shared language for educators, serve as a guide for practitioners, support those new to the field through accessible educational and developmental pathways, and inform policy efforts that respond to the urgency of emerging social and systemic challenges.

Focusing specifically on SIE, this phase explores students' core competencies, pedagogical approaches, and the challenges encountered in SIE through the lens of 16 academics teaching in universities across the globe. These academic insights lay the foundation for future research, which will incorporate perspectives from practitioners and social innovators.

Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews to examine how well-being and systems thinking competencies are integrated into SIE curricula, the key pedagogical methods employed, and the obstacles educators and students face.

Findings underscore the importance of well-being competencies, particularly reflective mindsets, self-awareness, resilience, and empathy into education for social innovation. The study also highlights the need to move beyond linear problem-solving by equipping students with the ability to navigate system complexity, understand mental models that drive change, collaborate with local communities, and move from theory to sustainable solutions. Pedagogical tools such as experiential learning, service learning, project-based learning, case studies, and co-curricular experiences serve as essential threads in this educational tapestry to play key roles in this development.

The research seeks to inform social innovation education aimed at preparing the next generation of changemakers, identifing key competencies essential for the success of social innovators, and supporting the improvement of training, development, and policy worldwide. Challenges identified include the necessary mindset shift from profit to social impact, the logistical and emotional demands of fieldwork, limited institutional support, time constraints, and the lack of adaptive, well-established teaching resources. These findings point to the need for structural reforms in higher education to support both educators and students in a rapidly evolving field.

1.2. Background

1.2.1. Defining Social Innovation

Social entrepreneurship is defined as the pursuit of innovative solutions to social problems that support both the social and economic objectives of organizations (Battilana et al., 2019; Bitzer et al., 2014; Brock & Steiner, 2009; Dees, 1998). This includes hybrid organizations that leverage economic models to sustain social ventures (Doherty et al., 2014; Mair and Martí, 2006; Pache et al., 2024). For the purpose of this research, we are using the Government Council on Social Innovation (GCSI), definition of social innovation as "pursuing novel approaches to tackle challenges facing people and the planet." (Rayner et al., 2025).

In this report, we use the terms social innovation and social entrepreneurship with awareness of the distinct definitional differences. While social entrepreneurship often emphasizes the process of launching and managing a social venture, social innovation focuses on developing innovative responses to complex social challenges. Although many of the programs referenced in this study are framed as social entrepreneurship, they do not solely prepare students to become founders of social ventures. Educators equip learners with the mindset, skills, and systems awareness to contribute to social change in a variety of roles across sectors. Students may go on to become policy advocates, intrapreneurs, researchers, community leaders, or collaborators within existing organizations, each playing a vital part in advancing social innovation.

Readers are encouraged to adopt the terminology that best reflects the intent and design of their own program model and educational context. To achieve this end, we provide definitions of social innovation from multilateral organizations, ecosystem actors, and academic sources in Appendix B of this report.

1.2.2. Global Evolution of Social Innovation Education and Ecosystem Development

Over the last two decades, a growing body of research has highlighted the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship in addressing complex societal challenges (Sutter et al., 2019; Tobias et al., 2013). There has been a steady increase in the number of social entrepreneurship courses taught outside of business schools, rising from 25% in 2009 (Brock & Steiner, 2009) to 36% by 2018 (Steiner et al., 2018). This shift reflects a broader recognition that social innovation is relevant across a wide range of disciplines: from public policy, nonprofit management, and social services to the hard sciences including engineering and systems design, plus within the growing number of environmental and sustainability programs. Today, entrepreneurship education extends well beyond the domain of business schools.

Pioneering organizations have played a crucial role in advancing the field. Ashoka, founded in early 1980s, along with Echoing Green, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, and the Skoll Foundation established the next year have played pivotal roles in advancing the field globally. In 2020, the ecosystem expanded further when these four organizations joined with 90 social entrepreneurs to launch Catalyst Now (originally Catalyst 2030), a collaborative movement led by social entrepreneurs, for social entrepreneurs, representing a diverse network of regional and national initiatives.

1. See a comprehensive list of definitions from multilateral organizations, ecosystem leaders, and academics (Rayner et al., 2025)

According to the State of Social Enterprise 2024 report, there are an estimated 10 million social enterprises globally, employing upwards of 200 million people, and generating an estimated $2 trillion in annual revenues (World Economic Forum, 2024). This global growth underscores the importance of expanding social innovation education across disciplines to prepare the next generation of changemakers.

1.2.3. Future Generations of Social Innovators

Although social entrepreneurship offers an appealing path for purpose-driven students with 54% of whom express a desire to make meaningful impact (Dik et al., 2019; Srinivasan et al., 2017), there continues to be a gap between aspiration and action. The 2023/2024 Sustainability Census by Acre reveals that most young professionals are still more likely to pursue roles in corporate social responsibility departments than in social enterprises or community-based initiatives, prioritizing traditional goals such as job security and compensation. Interviews with educators reinforce these findings, highlighting students' concerns around the sustainability of impact-focused career paths and challenges in transferring theory to practice. This points to a broader gap between students' aspirations and the competencies needed to succeed in social innovation, and raises the question of whether future generations are adequately prepared to navigate complex systems and lead transformative change. This is also echoed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report which urges schools to be reimagined to, “better promote the transformation of the world towards more just, equitable and sustainable futures.” (UNESCO, 2021).

In response to these gaps, this first-phase research explores the competencies, the broader set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors taught to students in social innovation education. Over the past decade, scholars have built on earlier calls for “mind-based competencies” to support heart-centered social entrepreneurs (Miller et al., 2012), proposing various classification frameworks. These include cognitive versus emotional competencies (Chien-Chi et al., 2020), competencies for autonomous versus interactive contexts (Frank et al., 2021), and personal versus practical focus areas (Cruz-Sandoval et al., 2022). Together, these frameworks reflect a shift toward more holistic competency development, emphasizing not only business growth but also weaving the personal growth of the social innovator.

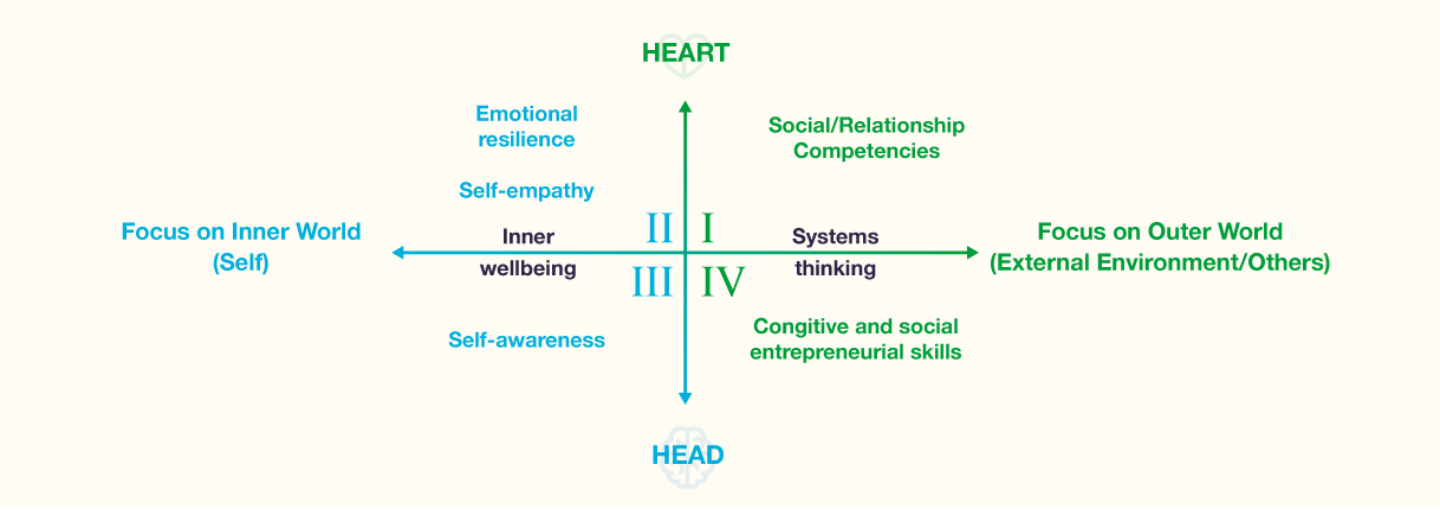
In parallel, the field of education for human flourishing has gained momentum, positioning education as a means to nurture the whole person, not only in terms of academic performance or cognitive ability, but also through cultivating character, wellbeing, purpose, and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to society (Ellyatt, 2022; VanderWeele & Hinton, 2024). This approach aligns closely with the aims of social innovation education, particularly in preparing future generations of changemakers who are both well and committed to creating positive social impact.

Inspired by this body of work, we developed a competency framework to guide our interviews. The framework offers an integrated perspective on what it means to grow as a social innovator both emotionally and critically, while also preparing future leaders to navigate the paradoxes inherent in social entrepreneurship—balancing financial performance with social impact (Smith & Besharov, 2019). It is organized along two key dimensions. The first distinguishes between competencies of the heart, which draw on emotion and intuition, and those of the head, which

emphasize critical thinking, logic, and reasoning. The second dimension considers the orientation of these competencies—whether they are applied inwardly, in relation to the self, or outwardly, in interaction with others.

Figure 1:
Framework for Social Innovation Competencies

- **These dimensions create four quadrants of competencies:**
- **Social/Relationship Competencies (using the heart outwardly): Building empathy, fostering collaboration, and forming meaningful connections with others.**
- **Emotional Resilience/Self-Empathy (using the heart inwardly): Cultivating emotional resilience, self-compassion, and the ability to understand and manage one's emotions.Self-Awareness (using the head inwardly): Engaging in reflective thinking to understand one's values, motivations, and personal growth.**
- **Cognitive Entrepreneurial/Business Skills (using the head outwardly): Applying strategic thinking, problem-solving, and business acumen to address external challenges and opportunities**



1.3. Research Objectives

This study explores core competencies in Social Innovation Education (SIE) and their integration into curricula. Specifically, the research aims to:

- Analyze the role of essential competencies, particularly well-being and systems thinking in SIE.
- Examine pedagogical approaches used by academics teaching SIE.
- Investigate the challenges faced by students and educators in SIE education.

2. Methodology

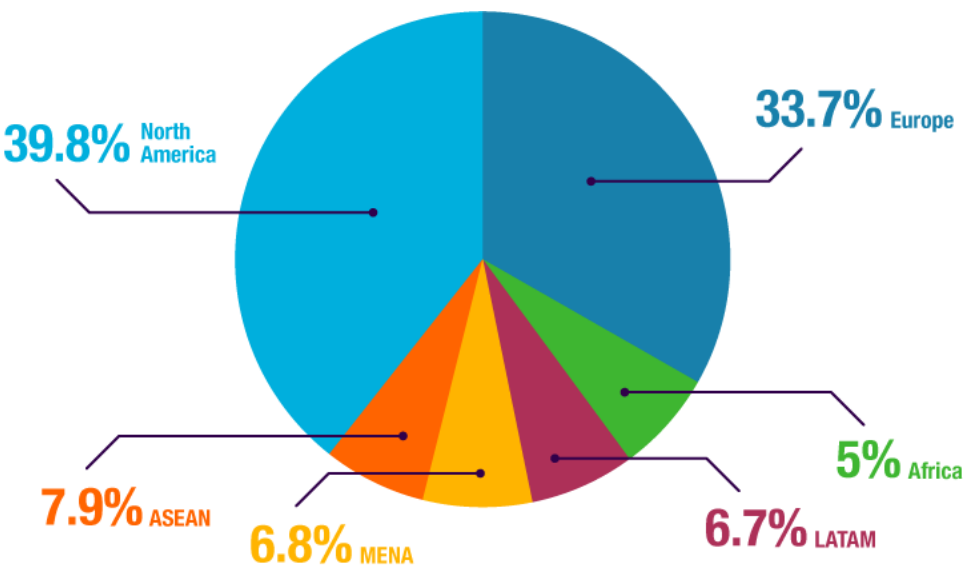
2.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, survey-based design with semi-structured interviews to explore academics' perspectives on Social Innovation Education (SIE). Qualitative research was used for the ability to provide in-depth interviews to gather insights, analyze, and interpret participants' experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). 16 academics from universities with active SIE programs participated in one-hour personal interviews, offering comprehensive perspectives on teaching methodologies, competencies, and challenges. The semi-structured format ensured consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to expand on key themes.

2.2. Sample Selection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure in-depth information (Patton, 2003). The study sample was drawn from a database of over 1,200 university contacts involved in social entrepreneurship education and/or research, spanning multiple global regions. The geographic distribution of universities in the database reflects the relative representation of social innovation programs, including majors, minors, certificate programs and individual courses, across the world.2

Figure 2
Geographic Representation of Social Innovation Programs, Majors, Minors, Courses



2. The database was developed through online searches and conversations with educators from 793 universities currently offering programs or courses. See the database of universities here:

Selection criteria for choosing educators and universities in this research:

- Currently employed full time at a university with a dedicated SIE program, course, and/or department.
- Experience teaching SIE-related subjects.
- Representation from diverse geographic regions and different educational contexts.

To ensure first hand insights into SIE curricular and pedagogy, universities without SIE programs were excluded from the study. To capture diverse perspectives, interviewees were selected from various global regions, allowing for a broad understanding of SIE challenges and opportunities across different educational and cultural contexts.

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting about one hour. Interviews were conducted in English or the participant's preferred language, with professional translators assisting when needed. Each session involved at least two interviewers, who alternated between questioning and note taking. Transcriptions were generated using Otter.ai and supplemented by manual summary notes to ensure accuracy and reliability.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data from 16 academic interviews were analyzed using a structured open coding process, reviewing the transcripts and interview notes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai and interview notes were compiled into one central document to facilitate organizational and accessibility for the coders. Each transcript was systematically reviewed to annotate key points, identify early themes, and highlight powerful quotations and emerging insights to create themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Using open coding, the authors separately tagged and highlighted recurring ideas across the interviews. These codes were then grouped into broader themes through axial coding, using Miro to visually cluster similar ideas and explore the interconnections among participants. This process facilitated the development of thematic categories around teaching methodologies, core competencies like well-being and systems thinking, and the challenges faced by educators.

After mapping connections between the emerging themes, cross-checking was done by returning to the research objectives to ensure alignment. Key patterns and insights were developed from these themes, with peer input contributing to the credibility of the findings. The final themes were used to structure the report and were supported by representative quotes directly from the interviews.

3. Core Competencies in Social Innovation Education

Social innovation is a complex and emergent field that extends beyond individual actions. It requires challenging established routines, resource allocations, power dynamics, and societal beliefs to mobilize collective action and develop innovative solutions (Schwandt et al., 2009). To prepare students for this complex work, research emphasizes the need for holistic competencies and specific learning environments that foster them (Ploum et al., 2017). While we use the term "competencies" in the research, in the classroom we focus on building students' skills, which are the learned abilities that enable them to perform tasks. The interviews offer insights into what contributes to the holistic development of students as they move from individual learners to social innovators committed to systems change.

From a broader perspective this section integrates the concepts of inner well-being and systems thinking. The journey begins with the ability to use both cognitive and emotional competencies to focus on the inner world, nurturing emotional resilience and self-awareness. As individuals strengthen their inner world, they are better equipped to transition to the outer world, again applying both cognitive and emotional competencies through a systemic approach. This dual focus enables social innovators to weave their work through a holistic, interconnected lens, recognizing the complexity of the systems they aim to impact and the essential role of personal development in fostering meaningful, sustainable change.

3.1. Inner Development & Well-being

The growth of social innovation is deeply intertwined with personal development and the desire to make a positive impact. Research highlights that aligning personal values with an organization's mission is key to fostering a supportive work culture that enhances inner well-being, reinforcing a sense of purpose and coherence (Guntzel & Johnson, 2020). This is particularly important as social innovators are often required to navigate the blending of social and financial goals; striving to drive meaningful change while ensuring the financial sustainability of the organizations (Alkire et al., 2020).

Inner well-being plays a fundamental role in shaping how social innovation education cultivates inner development competencies. Studies on well-being identify key dimensions such as happiness, engagement, meaning, life satisfaction, relationships, and accomplishment (Forgeard et al., 2011). Pursuing work of purpose has positive well-being benefits. These elements align closely with core competencies like a reflective mindset, self-awareness, resilience, and empathy, all of which are essential in preparing future social innovators to sustain their mission-driven work while maintaining personal fulfillment.

A reflective mindset fosters an understanding of personal experiences and values while encouraging introspection and the ability to engage with challenging perspectives. Self-awareness enhances this by connecting one's inner world with community needs, helping to clarify purpose and direction. Resilience further supports this process by enabling individuals to navigate real-world challenges, persist through adversity, and adapt to uncertainty. Finally, empathy builds bridges between changemakers and the communities they aim to serve, fostering meaningful relationships and enabling lasting social impact. These four areas—developing a reflective mindset, fostering self-awareness, strengthening resilience, and cultivating empathy—are essential for cultivating inner development and well-being in students. The table below provides an overview of each area, with additional insights shared by educators in the following pages.

Table 1
Four Areas of Cultivating Inner Development: Insights from the Research

Reflective Mindset	Educators nurture reflection, resilience, and optimism, educators help students connect their personal experiences with societal challenges. This fosters the ability to navigate complexity, challenge assumptions, and drive meaningful change.
Self-Awareness	Fostering self-awareness, students learn to align their actions with their values, navigate social change, and remain grounded in their values and professional growth
Resiliency	Strengthening resilience in challenging times is an important skill to learn. By teaching stress management strategies, highlighting career opportunities in social innovation, and reframing failure as a learning opportunity, students learn to adapt in uncertain environments.
Empathy	Fostering empathy through meaningful reflection, experiential learning, and collaboration, students develop empathy, ensuring their efforts to achieve social change are informed by and responsive to the needs of the communities served.

3.1.1. Cultivating a Reflective Mindset

Developing a reflective mindset allows students to engage deeply with their own lived experiences, helping them recognize how their backgrounds, values, and assumptions shape individual perspectives. Reflection enables students to unlearn biases, adopt a solution-oriented perspective, and align their actions with their core values, making their work more fulfilling (White, 2013). This approach helps them to develop an understanding of themselves and is important to social entrepreneurship education (Steiner & Brock, 2024). Satyajit Majumdar, former Professor and Dean of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, stresses the necessity of this transformation:

> "*Students must first look within before understanding society. It requires unlearning biases and embracing the belief that every problem is solvable when broken into parts.*"

By being aware of society's complex challenges and harboring a proactive and entrepreneurial mindset (Lawrence et al., 2012), students are better equipped to create impactful and sustainable solutions. Associate Professor Roberto Gutierrez Poveda from Universidad de los Andes emphasizes the importance of observational skills and critical thinking in solving real-world problems. To highlight the importance of regular self-reflection, Associate Professor Frédéric Dufays from Université de Liège shares:

> *"I regularly ask students to sit down and reflect on their experiences with projects, group dynamics, and how these experiences are shaping their perspectives of the world and their role as citizens."*

Educators also play a key role in fostering a reflective mindset. Ralph Hamann from University of Cape Town explains the role of a Socratic teaching style, one that focuses on asking questions and facilitating discussions rather than providing answers:

> "*The way I show up – I try to be open to feedback and emotions – this is a big part of my teaching approach. I focus on asking questions that guide the class discussion, rather than providing answers at the outset. The value of dialogue is central to my [teaching] approach.*"

Students entering the field of social innovation education are often deeply committed to social causes. Danijel Baturina from University of Zagreb believes their values should be preserved while also being channeled into practical implementation through reflection stating,

> *"My aim is for them to gain insights into entrepreneurial thinking and learn how to combine it with their social mindset."*

By fostering reflection, resilience, and optimism, educators help students connect their personal experiences to broader social realities, strengthening their ability to navigate complexity, challenge assumptions, and drive meaningful change. Through this process, students develop the mindset needed to translate their lived experiences into impactful, sustainable solutions for social good.

3.1.2. Building Self-Awareness for Sustainable Impact

Self-awareness serves as a bridge between individuals and their immediate surroundings, shaping how they interpret experiences, set boundaries, and engage with their environment. For changemakers, the pressure to meet idealized expectations can distort their sense of self, negatively impacting well-being. Reclaiming a holistic identity fosters clarity, balance, and resilience, benefiting both personal and professional effectiveness (Guntzel et al., 2020). Thomas Lyons, also the Clarence E. Harris Chair of Excellence in Entrepreneurship at the University of Tennessee, shared an example of a student who overextended herself, illustrating the need for classroom discussions on setting boundaries to protect mental health.

Competence, linked to self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence (White, 2013), is enhanced through self-awareness, enabling students to assess their abilities, set realistic goals, and avoid unnecessary stress. Walter Mswaka from Rollins College emphasizes that understanding one's limits is as important as recognizing one's strengths:

> *"You cannot solve everything alone. We teach students to assess risks and understand how much they can stretch themselves."*

Thomas Lyons highlights the role of self-awareness in personal transformation:

> *"At the start of the semester, I assign an essay where students reflect on their life experiences and skills. This helps them understand how their journey has shaped who they are today, fostering emotional intelligence and the ability to manage transformation."*

Practical strategies like guided meditation, mindfulness, and stretching complement theoretical learning, helping students manage stress and build resilience to recover from setbacks. Satyajit Majumdar, Dean of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, underscores the importance of self-awareness, while Paroma Bhattacharya, Head of Social Innovation at London School of Economics highlights how lived experiences shape entrepreneurial ambitions:

> "*These people are bringing a lot of rich lived experience. If you don't draw on that, it's a wasted opportunity.*"

Self-belief plays a crucial role in students' confidence as social innovators. Jonas Yawovi Dzinekou from the Institute for Social Transformation at Tangaza University College, notes:

> *"Many undergraduate students arrive with limited confidence, often coming from challenging backgrounds. When they start it uncover their potential, their attitude and mindset shift significantly. This change can redefine their approach to social entrepreneurship and beyond."*

By fostering self-awareness as a means of connecting with both oneself and one's environment, educators equip students with the tools to navigate social change while staying grounded in their values and realities.

3.1.3. Strengthening Resilience in Challenging Times

Resilience connects individuals to the realities of the outside world, helping them navigate uncertainty while staying grounded in their values. Social entrepreneurship is inherently unpredictable, with challenges like resource constraints, career insecurity, and self-doubt impacting emotional well-being (Forgeard et al., 2011). According to Danijel Baturina, many students hesitate to fully commit to social innovation due to the lack of clear career pathways. Financial instability, coupled with cultural and familial expectations that prioritize secure careers over personal fulfillment, adds further stress (Guntzel & Johnson, 2020).

To navigate these pressures, educators stress the importance of balancing external stability with internal growth, such as self-efficacy and emotional intelligence (White et al., 2013). Satyajit Majumdar emphasizes the need for educators to equip students with strategies to engage their families while staying committed to their goals. Vocational guidance, as emphasized by Constance Fleet from the School of Engineering in Pontificia Universidad

Católica, plays a crucial role in helping students envision a future where their transferable skills in social innovation can lead to careers that are both impactful and financially sustainable.

Saulo Dubard Barbosa from Emlyon Business School and Michael Conger from Miami University of Ohio underscore the importance of institutional support such as dedicated incubators, social innovation hackathons, and startup weekends, which provide mentorship, tangible resources, and real-life examples of social innovators. These initiatives also signal to students that social innovation is a legitimate and valued path, taken seriously within academic environments.

Beyond financial concerns, resilience is tested by setbacks, risks, and ethical dilemmas. When students do not see immediate results, thoughts like “It is not possible” or “Why does it not work my way?” can dominate their mindset. To face this, Walter Mswaka advocates for scenario analysis as a tool for teaching risk management as it helps students anticipate challenges, adjust plans, and manage risks, fostering emotional resilience. Similarly, Maria Fernanda Figueroa from Universidad Austral emphasizes the value of learning from both successful and unsuccessful cases of social innovation for students.

A strong sense of community is another pillar of resilience, countering the isolating nature of social entrepreneurship (Alkire et al., 2020). Educators emphasize the importance of mutual support, preparing students for the emotional highs and lows of this journey. According to Constance Fleet:

> "*This course is emotionally challenging. One of the most important things is to be together and support each other. We prepare students from the start for the emotional rollercoaster, telling them they might experience many challenges. So support your team. One day you want to save all the kids in the world, and the next day you discover this isn’t possible.”*

Despite these challenges, educators recognize that today’s students are driven by purpose and meaning. By teaching stress management strategies, conveying the career aspects of social innovation, and reframing failure as an opportunity for growth, educators help students develop resilience that not only sustains them personally but also enables them to engage with and adapt to the ever-changing realities of the world around them.

3.1.4. Fostering Empathy for Meaningful Collaboration

Empathy is central to the inner development of social entrepreneurs (Nandan & Scott, 2013), helping students connect with the communities they aim to serve and craft more effective solutions (Azqueta et al., 2023). Empathy is linked to entrepreneurial intent and a sense of moral

obligation (Hockerts, 2017). Social innovators need to have high ethical character (Valera et al., 2022), follow a strong moral compass, uphold a moral responsibility (Mair & Noboa, 2006), and exhibit empathy towards the social cause. Empathy is also connected with prosocial motivation (Bacq & Alt, 2018), where the desire to positively impact others without personal gain fuels lasting social change (Alkire et al., 2020). According to Saulo Dubard Barbosa:

> *"The world of social entrepreneurship is not black and white. While logical and analytical skills are crucial, they are not enough on their own. You also need to cultivate intuition, social skills and emotional intelligence."*

Walter Mswaka emphasizes that experiential learning and design thinking are key to cultivating empathy. When students adopt the perspectives of beneficiaries, they co-create solutions that are human-centered and impactful (Bacq et al., 2018; Neck et al., 2014). This aligns with research showing that empathetic social innovators develop solutions that address real needs (Korte et al., 2018).

Educators stress the importance of teaching social innovation allowing for diverse perspectives and the voices of those closest to the problem to deepen understanding of the problem and develop inclusive strategies. Collaborative work further enhances empathy, emotional resilience, and adaptability, essential for tackling large-scale problems (Ferraro et al., 2015; Guntzel & Johnson, 2020; Mair, 2020). As the African proverb says, "if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together".

*"If you **want to go fast,** go **alone.** If you **want to go far,** go **together."***

- African Proverb

Collaboration is required to address complex social problems (Ferraro et al., 2015) as systemic problems can not be addressed by one organization alone. This collaborative atmosphere aligns with the view that community engagement is crucial for sustaining social enterprises (Alkire et al., 2020). On an organizational level, connecting as human beings, rather than just professionals, fosters empathy and mutual support, creating a culture that enhances well-being (Guntzel, & Johnson, 2020). When students feel supported, their emotional resilience is strengthened, empowering them to approach social innovation with greater confidence and purpose.

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Jonas Yawovi Dzinekou highlights the importance of group work in developing relational abilities and conflict management, which are soft skills crucial for social entrepreneurs (Forgeard et al., 2011). Danijel Baturina stresses that collaboration is vital as, according to him, “There are few things that one can accomplish by themselves.” Empathy fosters trust, builds strong networks, and ensures ongoing success in social endeavors (Neck et al., 2014).

When it came to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, Audrone Urmanaviciene from Tallinn University, placed particular emphasis on international students to build a sense of community and ongoing support beyond the classroom:

> "*I created a WhatsApp group to stay in touch during and after the course; not just to check in on their well-being, but also to encourage interaction and collaboration between international and local students.*"

Similarly, Jonas Yawovi Dzinekou further stressed the importance of creating a non-judgmental classroom environment:

> "*It is important to create an environment where students feel safe and valued. Even students who don’t speak have a voice.*"

By focusing on empathy through reflection, experiential learning, and collaboration, educators help students bridge the gap between intention and impact, ensuring that their drive for social change is deeply connected to the realities of the world they strive to transform.

Figure 3
The Inner Dimensions of Social Change

3.2 Understanding Systems Thinking for Social Change

Systems thinking and systems change are becoming central in education, particularly in disciplines such as social work and social innovation, where students and educators grapple with the overwhelming complexity of social issues. Problems such as poverty, homelessness, and climate change frequently arise in discussions and are often described as wicked problems—problems with no simple explanations or solutions (Lönngren & van Poeck, 2021; Pittz et al., 2020). Systems thinking can serve as an empowering tool to navigate this complexity and drive meaningful societal transformation (Steiner et al., 2024). Systems thinking helps students identify the root causes of a problem (Meadows, 2008) and serves as a pathway to systems change, by shifting underlying assumptions, policies, and structures (Stroh, 2015; Kania et al., 2018).

Donella Meadow, author of Thinking in Systems: A Primer, an early thought leader in systems change said it best:

> *"Hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, economic instability, unemployment, chronic disease, drug addiction, and war, for example, persist in spite of the analytical ability and technical brilliance that have been directed toward eradicating*

them. No one deliberately creates those problems, no one wants them to persist, but they persist nonetheless. That is because they are intrinsically systems problems. They will yield only as we reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find courage to restructure it."

- Donella Meadows, Thinking in Systems: A Primer

Systems thinking provides a complementary lens to understand why complex social problems persist and how they can be transformed at the root level. In social innovation education, systems thinking offers a pathway from surface-level problem-solving to deeper system-shifting.

Donella Meadows' framework on leverage points helps innovators see how small, strategic changes, especially changes at the level of paradigms and structures, can create ripple effects across a system. This encourages students to ask:

- Are we solving symptoms or shifting systems?
- What narratives or power dynamics are sustaining the problem?
- Who must be involved in redesigning the system?

Additionally, Peter Senge's work on learning organizations and David Stroh's focus on mental models highlight the need for adaptive learning and reflection, critical skills for any social innovator working in uncertain environments. There are a number of frameworks and tools that were recommended to learn how to understand problems and map systems including Thinking in Systems, LOOPY: a tool for thinking in systems, DIY Toolkit by Nesta, and The 55 Minutes. Investing time in deeply understanding the core problem is crucial to the success of any social entrepreneurship initiative (Staunch et al., 2025). As Albert Einstein famously remarked, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend fifty-five minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions."

This theoretical grounding supports a shift in mindset from "delivering solutions" to facilitating systems change, a competency central to social innovation. As students begin to see themselves as changemakers, not just service designers, they engage more deeply with structural dynamics and collaborative impact.

3.2.1. Understanding the Problem: Uncovering System Complexity

Empathy, while fostered as part of students' inner development, also plays a key role in uncovering the systemic roots of social problems and understanding lived experiences. In design thinking, the first stage, ethnography, was frequently mentioned by educators during interviews as a method to prepare students to navigate social and environmental complexities. Although conveying complexity remains a challenge within traditional academic structures

particularly when addressing multifaceted issues like sustainability or social innovation (Anastasiadis et al., 2020), ethnographic approaches in design thinking offer an alternative to familiar, linear problem-solving methods.

Ethnographic research, in this context, involves immersing oneself in the realities of those directly impacted by a social issue, by observing, listening, and seeking to understand their lived experiences from their point of view. Rather than beginning with a predefined solution, this approach starts with curiosity and deep empathy, allowing insights to emerge from direct engagement with communities.

During interviews, educators shared how they introduce students to ethnographic thinking through practices such as community fieldwork, stakeholder interviews, story collection, and experiential

learning activities. These methods encourage students to slow down their desire to "fix" and instead spend time exploring the complexity of people's realities.

By encouraging students to listen closely and suspend judgment, ethnographic practices help build the foundation for more nuanced, human-centered problem framing. For example, Satyajit Majumdar, Dean of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, described sending students to live with communities for 10 days, explaining:

> *"If they can't live there, how can they develop empathy? They have to find their own way to understand the community. This is where transformation happens."*

While theories and tools may vary, a unifying theme emerged: helping students "see the problem bigger than they currently see", as shared by Jonas Yawovi Dzinekou. This means expanding students' understanding beyond immediate contexts—beyond the classroom, national boundaries, personal background, and present circumstances. Educators guide them to explore problems from multiple dimensions: social, technological, regulatory, environmental, cultural, and economic, allowing for a holistic view.

By examining issues through various temporal and systemic lenses, students develop a more nuanced perspective and move toward a solution development process that includes communities as problem-solvers and agents of change rather than merely beneficiaries. This aligns with the growing emphasis on systems leadership in social innovation education, where students are equipped not just to analyze problems, but to co-design solutions with a deep understanding of systemic interdependencies (Kania et al., 2018).

3.2.2. From Self-Awareness to Mental Models

Educators noted that a student's personal background significantly shapes how they perceive and approach social issues. This influence is particularly evident in social innovation education, where cultural norms, lived experiences, and personal values affect how students engage with systemic challenges. Culture emerged in an interview with Saulo Dubard Barbosa, who recalled an encounter with a Native American entrepreneur in the Amazon forest, describing it as a missing fourth element in the traditional triple bottom line. Immersing in culture when addressing systemic challenges becomes a journey, a journey from self-awareness to an understanding of mental models, in which students begin to recognize the personal biases and deeply held beliefs that shape their thinking, actions, and decision-making. This heightened awareness creates a strong foundation for students to become the change agents they aspire to be, as mental models are perceived to be foundational drivers of activity in any system (Kania et al., 2018). Ralph Hamann underscores these challenges:

> *"....the role of culture and tradition in creating social complexity is a critical theme. It can be quite difficult for people to get their heads around this if they're not awake to diverse cultures and different ways of looking at the world."*

To address this, educators stress the need for students to unlearn ingrained biases and adopt a more open mindset. A key competency in this process is the ability to question deeply and critically; an essential skill in developing systems change capacities. This begins with critically examining the existing system, as described by Associate Professor Frédéric Dufays, and, as former Professor Satyajit Majumdar puts it, "looking at society without superimposing your ideology, philosophy, [or] solutions."

Many programs emphasize the importance of resisting the urge to jump to solutions, instead encouraging students to cultivate a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. This reflective journey not only generates more meaningful and innovative solutions to pressing problems but also helps students unlock their passions. Michael Conger highlights that recognizing how personal dimensions shape students' worldviews is crucial for developing a stronger sense of purpose.

3.2.3. Collaboration with the Community and Seeing Interconnections

Achieving systems level change requires collaboration across sectors and stakeholder groups (Mair, 2020). Social ventures do not work in isolation; rather their success often depends on working with and learning from others who are directly affected by the problem. Those who have lived experience with the problem, those who are closest to the problem, what are often called "proximate leaders" are better positioned to address the social problem (Montgomery et al., 2020; Kramer, & Senge, 2018). Challenging traditional top-down approaches imposed from outside the community to addressing social problems, lasting change can only emerge from within communities (Rayner & Bonnici, 2021).

In SIE, students are expected to build relationships with community members, work collaboratively in diverse teams, and incorporate different viewpoints. Many programs integrate experiential learning such as fieldwork, service learning, or immersion experiences in marginalized communities. In more intense fieldwork, students live with underprivileged communities for extended periods. These experiences foster empathy, coalition-building, and a deeper connection to the realities of the systems they seek to transform.

Educators identified academic environments as barriers to engaging with and understanding real-world social problems. Several professors likened campuses to "bubbles," shielding students from the complexities of society. Michael Conger noted that social issues in local communities are often invisible to students, and that campuses, when not meaningfully connected to their surrounding communities, can act as veils, preventing students from encountering the lived experiences of others. As one educator put it, "[The university] is like a hotel for college students. Primarily white, primarily wealthy, privileged, and relatively sheltered life."

Other educators actively use this contrast to guide students toward broadening perspectives. For example, Ralph Hamann described the university location in a tourist area in Cape Town, sharing:

> *"Our main campus is in a famous waterfront development with lots of wonderful restaurants and cafes and shops and entertainment and so on. But if we drive for 30 minute we get into very different kinds of urban environments, with poverty, lacking infrastructure, and insecurity, and this is the lived reality of most Capetonians. So, a big part of the course is about understanding the diversity in these contexts, and really becoming very conscious of context. We also spend a bit of time in our satellite campus in one such community and this allows for a bit more immersion."*

Figure 4
The University of Cape Town

Note: The University of Cape Town is located in a wealthy area of South Africa. Located close to the University campus are informal settlements shown in Figure 5 below. (Photo: UCT Graduate School of Business).

Figure 5:
The Village from Philippi in Cape Town

Note: The Village from Philippi mural was co-designed with residents, integrating public art and safety in the community. (Photo: Ashraf Hendricks)

Engaging with stakeholders is a crucial component of systems thinking, as it enables individuals to understand interrelationships and recognize patterns of change within a system (Senge, 1990). Rather than treating issues like poverty or food insecurity as isolated events, systems thinking reframes them as emergent outcomes of interconnected structures influenced by policies, cultural norms, economic flows, and mental models (Meadows, 2008). Students learn to map systems, identify leverage points, and recognize where interventions can lead to more sustainable impact.

Initiatives designed to help students engage with stakeholders focus on identifying key stakeholders and clients while highlighting the relationships among them. Educators use tools such as systems mapping, stakeholder mapping, causal mapping, participatory planning, and power and influence frameworks. These frameworks help students uncover the complexity of the systems they choose to transform. Saulo Dubard Barbosa emphasized the importance of direct interaction with stakeholders:

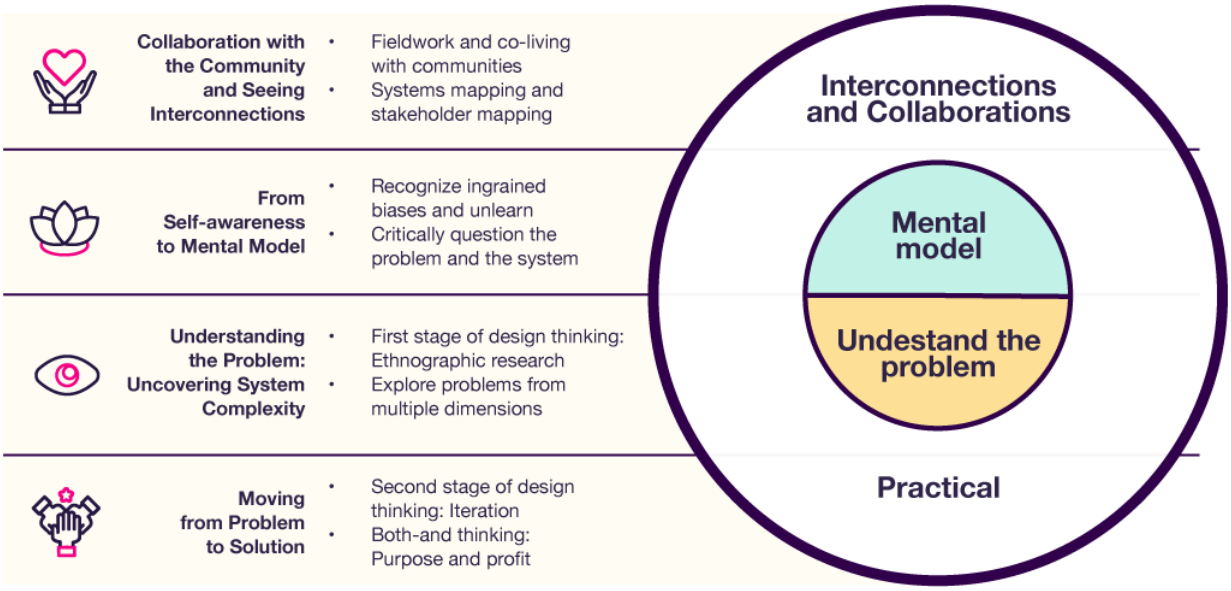
> *"[Students] need to identify actors that are working in the field, generally NGOs etc. Depending on what they're doing, they go to schools, they go to associations for homeless people… That experience is important, they need to know who their beneficiaries are, they need to talk with them."*

As an introduction to systems thinking and interconnectedness, Saulo Dubard Barbosa employs a classroom exercise called the "system walk."

> *"I basically just simplify it in the classroom. So I just ask them [students] to stand up, and then to observe one person. Don't tell anyone who the person is. And we start walking. I say you should always keep the same distance from that person. Don't tell anyone who it is. And then you see people moving in a way that's a bit weird. After a moment, you see kind of a pattern, right? Then I say, Now focus on two people. Keep the same distance from these two people, and let's walk. After we experienced this, well, this is a system. So everyone here is interconnected,and you see that if one piece, one little part of it moves, well, the whole system has to adapt and will move as well."*

This simple interactive exercise helps students grasp the dynamic nature of systems thinking, reinforcing the idea that every stakeholder interaction has multiple effects. Educators bear the responsibility to ensure that stakeholder interactions are actively nurtured. This is a challenge that instructors face when designing curricula and facilitating these connections. Educators often depend on their professional experience and personal networks to design courses grounded in real-world contexts. While universities recognize the importance of building relationships with local communities and incentivize such efforts, it remains a persistent challenge in the field (Gamoran, 2018)

Figure 6
Understanding Systems Thinking for Social Change



3.2.4. Moving from Problem to Solution

Social entrepreneurs and innovators are challenged to move beyond conventional solutions to explore innovative approaches to address social issues (Steiner & Brock, 2024). To help students transition from understanding the root causes of a problem to developing practical solutions, educators introduce concepts and tools such as iteration in design thinking, leverage points, Theory of Change, among others. Design thinking has emerged as a valuable method for guiding this shift. It moves from ethnographic research, which helps students understand system complexity, to ideation and iteration, while keeping beneficiaries and users at the center of the solution design. Paroma Bhattacharya emphasized the iterative nature of this approach:

> *"From the design thinking workshop, which happened in the first semester, we keep emphasizing that message that it's a work in progress, and you have to keep trying and pivoting and iterating and trying to get better for the thing that you want to solve."*

Walter Mswaka underscores the role of empathy in design thinking, which aligns with section on emotional competencies, especially empathy, are critical in social innovation:

> *"Design thinking focuses on empathy and problem-solving helping students connect emotionally with their beneficiaries. By understanding the perspectives and needs of those they aim to serve, students can better tailor their approaches in social entrepreneurship."*

Thomas Lyons reinforces the value of this human-centered approach:

> *"We don't call them customers. We may call them beneficiaries, but the fact of the matter is that they are the people who should be driving everything, and their needs should be at the essence of everything. So it's problem-solution. Have we started talking to people? Have we observed them in their context to see what it is they really needed, what they might really want?"*

As hands-on learning and deeper stakeholder engagement become more central, many educators are shifting away from traditional academic essays toward more experiential learning methods, including hands-on community projects, simulations and case analysis. One educator introduced a simulation where students managed real money, requiring them to justify expenditures and make strategic decisions. This approach reinforced financial responsibility while emphasizing resourcefulness, a critical skill in social innovation.

Another key theme in transitioning from problem to solution focus on the need to balance purpose and profit, a distinction from traditional entrepreneurship (Uygur et al., 2013). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) report calls for education to focus on problem oriented learning, focusing on not only recognizing problems but solving them. Navigating this duality highlights the complex demands of social entrepreneurship, a skill set beyond the analytical abilities typically taught in business schools. Educators emphasize the 'both-and' thinking as an important mindset for building the capacity to balance social impact and financial sustainability. This mindset is reflected in the ability to collaborate, engage with stakeholders, and create collective impact—moving beyond the notion of purpose and profit as an either-or dilemma.

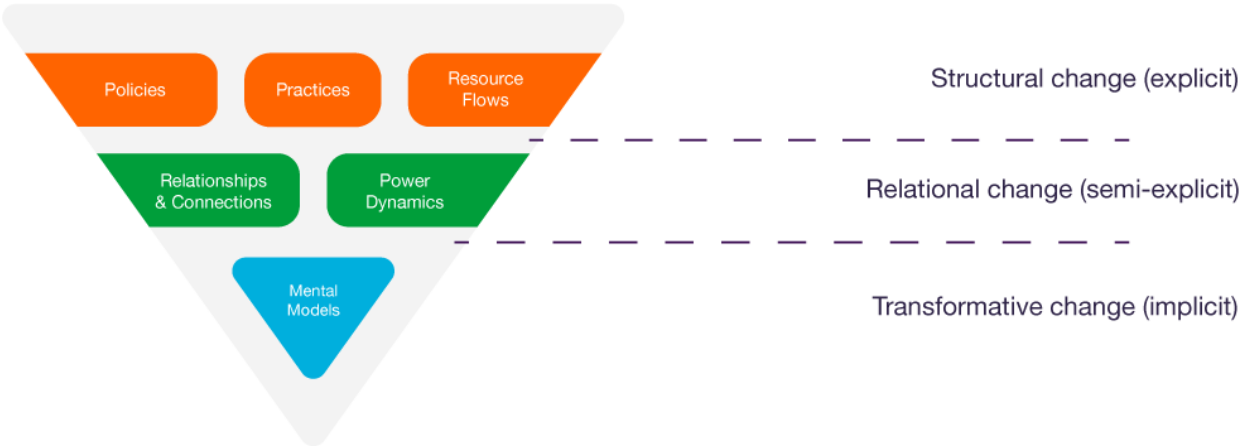
Several educators are reexamining the concept of innovation. Satyajit Majmudar, of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, argues that innovation is key to fostering creativity within social enterprises, noting that true innovation does not occur in isolation. Social innovators who take the time to evaluate whether their innovations achieve the desired outcomes are also those most actively engaged with stakeholders (Lubberink et al., 2018).

3.3. Integrating Inner Development and Systems Thinking: Preparing for Transformational Change

Transforming how we educate future changemakers requires systemic change within social innovation education itself. Education systems are not static structures, but living systems that must be intentionally designed to foster flourishing for both individuals and communities (Ellyatt, 2022). This calls for a systems approach to education, one that integrates both inner wellbeing and systems thinking as foundations for meaningful, sustained change.

The Six Conditions of Systems Change model developed by FSG (Kania et. al, 2018), though often applied externally to guide social innovators in addressing complex social challenges, is equally relevant when used to examine and evolve the education systems that prepare them. This model calls for transformation across three layers: explicit conditions such as policies, practices, and resource flows; semi-explicit conditions including relationships and power dynamics; and implicit conditions, which refer to mental models. Among these, mental models — those deeply held beliefs, assumptions, and values — are often the hardest to shift, yet they hold the greatest potential for enabling lasting change. They shape how individuals perceive and engage with the world, and influence their sense of agency to challenge and shift the systems they are part of.

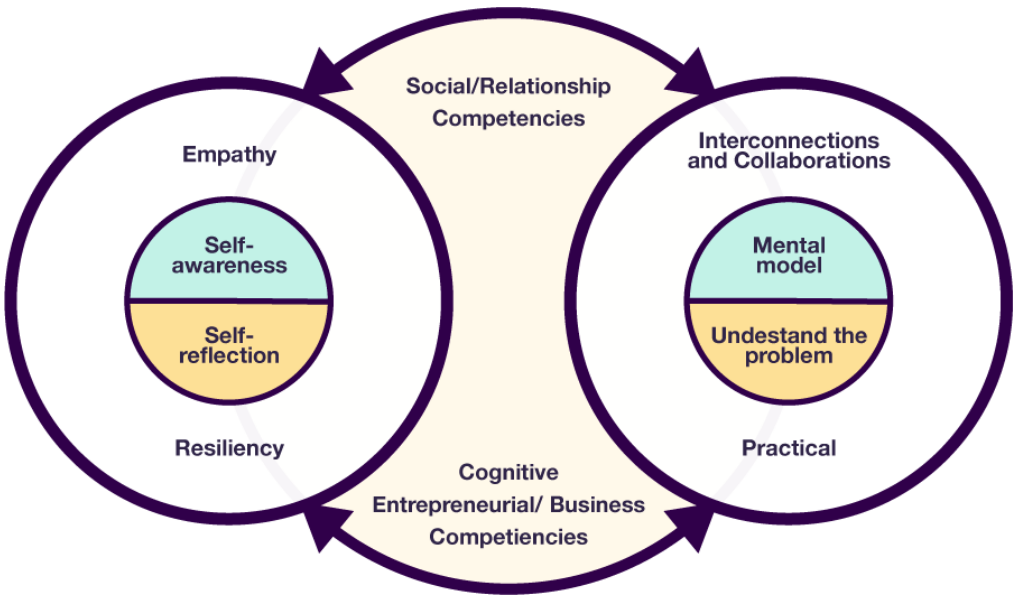
Figure 7
Six Conditions of Systems Change



Source: The Water of Systems Change report by FSG

Future generations of social innovators are at the heart of this shift. They carry the opportunity to co-create new systems rather than conform to existing ones. Yet preparing students for systems change work requires more than technical knowledge. It demands a deeper focus on inner development and systems thinking to navigate complexity and drive transformative impact. Figure 8 illustrates this progression, showing the transformation from self to society, and from passion for a problem to meaningful action.

Figure 8
Integrating Inner Development and Systems Thinking: Preparing for Transformational Change



The left circle in the framework represents the inner journey, while the right circle illustrates the shift from recognizing a problem to taking meaningful action. This process is far from linear. Introspection and self-awareness provide the foundation for individuals to engage with broader systems. Social and relational competencies, along with cognitive and business-oriented skills, help contextualize this self-awareness within interactions with others. This supports individuals in understanding how their mental models intersect with those of others, shaping how they perceive and approach the problems they seek to address, and directly contributes to shifting the mental models condition - the most deeply embedded layer in the Six Conditions of Systems Change. Through this dynamic interaction between self and system, individuals begin to understand not only the problems they seek to address but also the role they wish to play in catalyzing change.

This inner–outer integration builds a strong foundation for cultivating resilience and empathy, two qualities essential for developing a systems perspective. Such a perspective involves recognizing interconnections and embracing a shared purpose for collaboration. This helps not only to create the conditions for relationships and connections but also to break down power dynamics by shifting power to those who are directly impacted by the social problem.

Ultimately, this developmental journey creates the capacity to co-design practical, impactful solutions that influence the more visible, explicit conditions of systems namely the policies, practices, and resource flows. Social, relational, and cognitive competencies act as the bridge throughout, making inner work transferable to the outer work of systems change.

The journey from intention to impact is not a linear path but an iterative and reinforcing process. Still, it often begins with inner development, highlighting the critical role of both inner growth and systems thinking as foundations for transformational change in social innovation education.

Preparing Educators for Transformational Change

Change begins with how educators show up: their mindset, values, and the narratives they choose to emphasize in the classroom. These shifts in mental models and relationships including how teachers see their role, how students develop self-awareness, and how learning environments foster deeper reflection from the foundation of this transformation. However, no single educator or institution can drive this transformation alone. Collective action among programs, institutions, and educators, like the collaboration in this research project, is a critical step toward building shared vision, coordinated strategies, and aligned efforts that can amplify impact.

Finally, without supportive policies, access to resources (human capital, funding access, informational, and institutional infrastructure), such changes will remain isolated and unsustainable. Long-term systemic change in social innovation education demands integrated work across all six conditions to truly support the inner well-being and systems thinking capacities of the next generation of social innovators.

4. Pedagogical Approaches to Social Innovation Education

Effective pedagogy is essential in social innovation education, equipping students not only with conceptual knowledge but also with the practical and emotional tools to address complex social challenges. Innovative teaching methods have been shown to enhance student engagement (Åstebro & Hoos 2021; Pischetola et al., 2021) and better prepare students to address grand challenges (Deo et al., 2024; Ferraro et al., 2015).

High-impact practices such as collaborative projects, undergraduate research (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018), service learning (Halberstadt et al., 2019), internships (Trager, 2020), and capstone projects are recognized for promoting deep learning and improved academic outcomes (Kuh, 2008). Globally, higher education institutions are incorporating social innovation education to equip students with the tools for driving social entrepreneurship (Brock & Steiner, 2009; Mair et al., 2006; Shabbir, 2024). Despite its expanding presence, research on the most effective teaching practices in this area remains limited (Mukesh et al., 2024; Steiner et al., 2024), and this study contributes to closing that gap.

To bridge theory and practice, educators commonly apply experiential strategies such as fieldwork, project-based learning, and service learning. These methods ground students in real-life case studies (Kwong et al., 2012), collaborations with local ventures, and co-curricular opportunities, which further reinforce student learning and engagement (Sousa-Filho et al., 2023; Thomsen et al., 2021). Based on our interviews with diverse educators, the following approaches are commonly employed by educators.

4.1. Experiential Learning

Experiential learning emphasizes the transformation of experience into knowledge (Kolb, 1984) and is recognized as a foundational pedagogy for social entrepreneurship education (Åstebro & Hoos, 2021). This approach actively engages students through real-world problem solving, places students at the center of the learning process and promotes collaboration with social innovators (Chui et al., 2023).

This connection between learning and action is particularly critical in social innovation education. As Paroma Bhattacharya explains:

> *"Everything that I design or try to teach definitely needs to have that experiential theory-to-practice element because anyone who's interested in learning about entrepreneurship inherently has a bias toward action. So if you don't provide that space to act in some way or make it their own—and often, these people are bringing a lot of rich lived experience, right? … If you don't draw on that, it's a wasted opportunity."*

4.2. Project-Based Learning and Field Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL) encourages students to develop practical solutions to social problems, through capstone projects and consulting engagements, (Chang et al., 2014; Hockerts, 2018).

Fieldwork involves structured community engagement, interviews, participatory action research, and problem solving, deepening students' understanding of local challenges.

At the London School of Economics, students collaborate on a year-long team based project with field partners in Kenya and South Africa, applying theoretical frameworks to real-world problems. Other universities emphasized the importance of fieldwork in their master's program to immerse students in the local communities, ultimately enhancing their impact.

4.3. Service Learning

Service learning blends community engagement with structured reflection and is recognized as a valuable tool to build competencies in social entrepreneurship education (Halberstadt et al., 2019; Nandan & Scott, 2013).

At the L'Université de Liège, students provided a feasibility study for a homeless shelter, advising against a planned project. The students felt uncomfortable delivering this "negative" recommendation; however, the client expressed gratitude for the project report's honesty for a project that was not sustainable.

A key element of service learning is structured reflection, prompting students to consider their learning and to improve skill development (Lundmark et al., 2019). At the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, learning is reinforced by maintaining a reflection diary, to further embed learning:

> *"This practice encourages them to integrate their values with their actions and deepen their understanding of themselves."*

4.4. Case Method

The case method places students in decision making roles within real-world scenarios (Kwong et al., 2012), improving critical thinking and practical application of skills. Educators use the case study method in a variety of ways from financial planning, to fostering social skills and emotional intelligence.

Case authors typically include teaching notes to assist educators to guide discussions and ensure key lessons are learned from the case. While larger case publishers produce a number of cases, scholars emphasize the need for more geographically diverse cases in different contexts. Paroma Bhattacharya noted, "We need cases that are built from different regions of the world—Africa, Asia, South America."

4.5. Interdisciplinary Learning & Co-Curricular Learning Adaptability

Social innovation education thrives across diverse disciplines, integrating perspectives from business, public policy, environmental studies, social sciences, and other fields to tackle root causes and potential solutions to complex problems (Bacq & Janseen, 2011; Brock & Steiner, 2009). At the L'Université de Liège, nursing students learn alongside peers in management and social sciences, fostering cross disciplinary insights.

Research shows the importance of co-curricular learning – extracurricular opportunities that complement academic instruction – enhances students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations (Sousa-Filho et al., 2023; Thomsen et al., 2021) is a crucial aspect of SIE. At Miami University of Ohio, students collaborate across programs on innovation challenges earning academic credit, while addressing issues from mental health and addiction.

These activities build leadership, practical skills, strategic thinking, and an entrepreneurial mindset (Kickul & Lyons, 2020) boosting their self-efficacy (Mukesh et al., 2024). As Roberto Gutierrez Poveda emphasized:

> *"I don't believe in depositing knowledge into students' heads like a bank account and then asking for the balance. Skills need to be practiced repeatedly: through simulations, case discussions, and collaborative reading. That's how real learning happens."*

Research indicates that participation in these value-creation extracurricular activities contributes to students' entrepreneurial mindset, increasing their intention to pursue social ventures. Engaging in co-curricular activities outside of the classroom enhances students' entrepreneurship skills, builds their emotional intelligence and confidence to tackle complex social challenges.

Table 2
Pedagogical Methods in Social Innovation Education

Method	Research	Skill Development
Experiential Learning	Experiential learning is defined as the "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984).	Research skills, communication, critical analysis. Students run social ventures, ethnographic research, and study abroad programs.
Project Based Learning	Project-based learning encourages students to develop practical solutions to social problems.	Collaboration, stakeholder engagement, data collection. Developing a business plan/model for a social venture.
Service Learning	Service-learning is a structured teaching strategy that integrates community engagement and intensive reflection to promote student learning (Campus Compact).	Empathy, civic engagement, reflection, team skills. Collaboration with social ventures, organizing a student initiative on campus.
Case Method	Case studies place the students as the protagonists, requiring them to analyze data to make decisions on complex problems and defend their position (Kwong et al., 2012).	Critical thinking, decision making, emotional intelligence. Presenting data analysis, making recommendations.

Interdisciplinary & Co-Curricular Learning	The importance of co-curricular learning, the extracurricular opportunities that complement academic learning and enhance students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations is important to SEE (Sousa-Filho et al., 2023; Thomsen et al., 2021). opportunity to apply their knowledge to real-world situations. develop empathy, ensuring their efforts to achieve social change are informed by and responsive to the needs of the communities served.	Leadership skills, cross sector collaborations, self efficacy. Internships, competitionsUniversity-based incubators /accelerators, starting a social venture, attending conferences, student clubs (e.g. Net Impact).

4.6. The Role of Pedagogy in Competency Development

Selecting the right pedagogical approach ensures that students gain both theoretical knowledge and the practical skills required for careers in social innovation. Walter Mswaka highlights the value of student-centered learning, allowing learners to take an active role in constructing knowledge, with educators serving as facilitators rather than traditional lecturers. This approach aligns with UNESCO's (2021) call to create educational environments where learners and educators are at the heart of transformation.

Through hands-on, team based projects, interdisciplinary collaboration, and co-curricular experiences, students develop competencies such as critical thinking, systems thinking, and resilience. Exposure to real-world challenges with the possibility of failure, strengthens their adaptability and leadership abilities.

A thoughtful mix of teaching approaches, prepares students with the tools needed to drive meaningful social change. Appendix 7.2 outlines the skills associated with each pedagogy, with examples and supporting resources. As the field evolves, universities must adapt their pedagogical approaches to prepare the next generation of changemakers through experiential, interdisciplinary, and reflective learning approaches.

5. Challenges in Social Innovation Education

Educators face a range of challenges in developing programs and courses that prepare students for social impact careers. These include teaching essential soft skills like empathy, resilience, adaptability, and identifying effective ways to evaluate students' growth in these areas. Another challenge is shifting the mindset of business school leadership from a narrow focus on profit to a broader approach that includes social and environmental outcomes. Fieldwork is also critical but logistically demanding for educators, students, and university administrators. Additionally, helping students build the emotional competencies required for success in social innovation is difficult, especially when educators themselves may lack training in this area. Finally, there is a pressing need for stronger institutional support of SIE.

5.1. Assessing Soft Skills in Social Entrepreneurship Education

In a world where artificial intelligence (AI) continues to advance, it is more important than ever for those working to solve social issues to develop the skills that make us uniquely human. The term soft skills is used here to emphasize the contrast with the technical or "hard" skills often associated with technological skills like software skills and AI. These human-centered abilities, such as empathy, resilience, and adaptability, are essential for social entrepreneurs who must navigate complex, real-world challenges.

Table 3
Soft Skills vs. Hard Skills in Social Entrepreneurship Development

Hard Skills

- Technical skills and abilities tend to be quantified and measurable.
- Critical thinking
- Analytical and problem-solving skills
- Systems thinking skills
- Technical literacy skills (big data, software skills, networks, artificial intelligence, etc.)

Soft Skills

- Soft skills refer to the ability to relate to and work with other people, and are harder to measure.
- Leadership and people skills
- Adaptability and resilience
- Collaboration
- Self-awareness
- Creativity and innovation

One of the key challenges in social innovation education is assessing students' development beyond cognitive competencies. While analytical skills and theoretical knowledge can be measured through traditional assessments, soft skills are more difficult to quantify within a classroom setting. Maria Ballesteros-Sola from the University of Channel Islands highlights this difficulty:

> *"...there is the challenge of measurement. Even students who earn an A; did they truly develop these competencies? While grading aligns with learning objectives and cognitive skills are easier to assess, measuring soft skills remains much more difficult."*

This challenge raises important questions about how educators can evaluate personal and interpersonal growth in students. Although soft skills play a crucial role in the success of social innovators, conventional grading systems may fail to capture their full development.

5.2. Shifting Business School Mindsets from Profit to Social Impact

Business schools have traditionally emphasized financial success, often prioritizing profit-driven thinking over social concerns. This presents a challenge in social innovation courses, where students must transition from a purely financial mindset to a deeper understanding of social issues. Matthew Nash from Stanford Graduate School of Business highlights this gap:

> *"One student questioned why we do not have a class on movements and movement-building, even though we emphasize their importance. It is rare to find such discussions in a business school."*

Saulo Dubard Barbosa reflects on the initial resistance among students, noting how their early focus on profit made social entrepreneurship seem secondary:

> *"At first, students saw themselves in business school and were primarily focused on making money. That is why social entrepreneurship was initially an elective. Fortunately, this mindset has changed—students are now much more concerned about social issues."*

Maria Fernanda Figueroa highlights the challenge private universities face in shifting their priorities toward social entrepreneurship education:

> *"There is a long-standing tradition that has been hard to change. The focus has mostly been on corporate goals, so introducing the idea of social enterprises is not easy."*

Bridging this gap requires rethinking how business schools frame success and integrating social impact, inner development, and ethical leadership into their core curriculum to cultivate socially conscious entrepreneurs.

5.3. Challenges in Fieldwork

Fieldwork provides students with the opportunity to learn outside of the traditional classroom setting to collect data, observe individuals, and interact with community members in a real world environment to enhance student learning, gain practical experience, and achieve impact. A key challenge is navigating fieldwork logistics. Engaging with communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders is essential for experiential learning, yet accessing the right people, securing partnerships, identifying meaningful projects, and coordinating schedules often pose significant hurdles. Saulo Dubard Barbosa highlights these difficulties:

> *"The challenge is more about accessing people in the field, managing timing, reaching out to organizations, and scheduling meetings."*

Similarly, Associate Professor Frédéric Dufays emphasizes the continued challenge of connecting with key stakeholders:

> *"The biggest challenge remains finding the right people to collaborate with—whether it is reaching out to NGOs or engaging with beneficiaries."*

While such experiences are invaluable for students, organizing community partnerships and managing the logistics can be overwhelming for both educators and students already carrying full course loads. These obstacles highlight the persistent difficulty of establishing connections, securing partnerships, and navigating the logistical barriers that often hinder meaningful fieldwork in social innovation.

5.4. Building Emotional Competencies in Students

Despite its importance, emotional competency development is often overlooked in social innovation education due to limited resources, time constraints, and inadequate educator training. Matthew Nash acknowledges this gap.these difficulties:

> *"Teaching emotional competencies properly is generally lacking….it is not as comprehensive as it should be. Graduate groups tend to benefit more, with regular advising, coaching sessions, and feedback, but overall, more emphasis is needed to prepare students for balancing the challenges of this sector."*

Educators also struggle with their own lack of training in this area. Associate Professor Frédéric Dufays shares:

> *"We do not really focus on it. We are placing more and more emotional distress on students, and we acknowledged thatin our last team meeting. We will try to address it next year. However, teaching these skills is a learning process for us as well, as we are not trained in this area."*

Emotional competencies like self-awareness, resilience, empathy, and mindfulness are vital in social innovation education. However, some students resist these practices, perceiving them as unrelated to their academic or professional goals. Saulo Dubard Barbosa recalls:

> "*One student was so uncomfortable with the exercise, and she ended up saying, 'I can't do that. I'm here to learn, not to breathe.*"

The lack of emphasis on emotional development represents a missed opportunity. Integrating these competencies into the curriculum and investing in educator training are crucial steps toward preparing students for the complexities and challenges that people working in the social sector face.

5.5. Time Constraints and Lack of Institutional Support

A significant challenge in SIE is the time constraints faced by educators and the lack of institutional support for integrating community engagement into curricular. Many universities operate within rigid structures that do not prioritize experiential learning opportunities, making it difficult for educators to connect students with the community. Danijel Baturina highlights this barrier:

> "*Universities have traditional structures. If you want to do something beyond the curriculum, like engaging students with the community, it becomes difficult because it is not formally recognized. There is little to no support from the university administration for organizing initiatives such as competitions or fieldwork.*"

In addition to institutional barriers, the heavy workload placed on faculty is another challenge. Maria Ballesteros-Sola explains:

> "*Planning and executing these initiatives takes a tremendous amount of effort from professors. For a few semesters, we managed, but it became overwhelming. Without support from the university, faculty members are left to do this work out of passion, making teaching unnecessarily burdensome.*"

These barriers further complicate the issue. Innovative pedagogies that go beyond textbook-based teaching often require more time and resources, making administrative backing essential. Further, SIE courses are often limited to short academic terms, which restrict the depth of learning and the ability to engage in meaningful fieldwork. As Maria Ballesteros-Sola notes:

> "*The challenge is time; 16 weeks is simply not enough. We are trying to accomplish too much in too little time.*"

These constraints not only limit the effectiveness of SIE but also highlight the need for dedicated programs and institutional commitment to supporting social innovation education.

Yet, there are promising signals. In some countries, higher education institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of SIE and the role of ecosystem support. Audrone Urmanaviciene notes:

> *"What is specific about Estonia is that everyone understands the importance of collaboration. People from the public sector are also involved in social innovation. Attention and interest in higher education institutions is growing, and so is support from ecosystem partners."*

This growing recognition offers a hopeful outlook, pointing toward models of integration where institutional support, community involvement, and policy alignment can converge to strengthen the impact of social innovation education.

5.6. Access to Knowledge and Sharing Best Teaching Practices

Teaching social entrepreneurship presents unique challenges due to the lack of empirical research (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Hoogendoorn et al., 2010; Short et al., 2009; Teasdale et al., 2022), institutional support, and global knowledge exchange. Many educators, often without a traditional background in social innovation, are tasked with developing courses with little guidance on best practices. Unlike other established fields, educators in this area often point to a lack of books, structured curricula, and a robust global teaching network. As Danijel Baturina noted, the absence of a local teaching community makes it difficult for educators to support each other and share best practices. To address the lack of teaching resources, initiatives like the Social Change Innovators knowledge hub aims to address this gap by fostering collaboration between social entrepreneurs, educators, and social impact actors to achieve systems-level change. The platform facilitates knowledge sharing and resource development,

and emphasizes values such as empowerment, integrity, and collaboration. In addition, the Social Innovation Education Handbook has been published for academics, practitioners, and educators at all levels who want to teach social innovation and systems change skills to influence positive social impact.

Adapting social innovation education to local contexts adds another layer of complexity. In some regions, courses are co-developed with practitioners to ensure they are relevant to local challenges. However, in areas where social innovation is still emerging, educators struggle to introduce the topic in a way that resonates with students. Many also lack awareness of the core competencies needed to effectively design and teach courses. Interviews with academics show that this is especially true in places where social innovation is not yet widely recognized, resulting in a lack of understanding.

A further challenge is the limited empirical research and academic content, particularly in emerging economies. While social innovation has gained traction in academia, the majority of published research still comes from the Global North, leaving significant gaps in knowledge about social ventures in the Global Majority. Additionally, institutional incentives to conduct research in this field remain limited.

The nature of social innovation itself also presents pedagogical challenges. Unlike traditional business courses that rely on lectures, social innovation programs focus on action, developing the skills needed to become successful. Social innovation courses often include students from diverse disciplines and experience levels, requiring educators to continuously adapt their teaching strategies. The field evolves rapidly, demanding constant pedagogical adaptation. As Thomas Lyons, co-author of Understanding Social Entrepreneurship The Relentless Pursuit of Mission in an Ever Changing World, shared:

> "*The books [become] obsolete quickly. We wanted to build in some forward-looking research that is happening [in] SE ecosystems. Where is this taking us? What does this suggest for SE? We had a chapter on the future of SE, [but] no one was using it because it was stale.*"

To prepare students for the unpredictable and systemic challenges they will face, educators must continuously refine their methods and find innovative ways to keep courses relevant and engaging.

6. Key Takeaways and Recommendations

This study is intended as both a research contribution and a practical guide, that informs higher education institutions, social innovators (practitioners), and policymakers seeking to strengthen the training and development of social innovators in a rapidly evolving world.

6.1. For Higher Education Institutions

Advancing social innovation education requires a reimagining of how institutions design curriculum, approach pedagogy, and engage students, placing greater emphasis on building relationships among stakeholders and with the planet. This shift involves moving beyond traditional profit-centric business models toward curricula that emphasize ethical leadership, systems thinking, and social impact. While the top twenty MBA programs in the world offer courses in social entrepreneurship (Awaysheh & Bonfiglio, 2017), only a few integrate social impact as a core component and such efforts remain rare. A more transformative approach embeds community engagement with systems thinking, equipping students with the tools to address complex, interconnected social challenges rather than linear problem-solving.

To operationalize shifts, institutions can co-develop courses in collaboration with practitioners. This ensures that students have direct exposure to working with nonprofits, social enterprises, and community based organizations. Prioritizing experiential learning through fieldwork, community immersions, interdisciplinary innovation labs, and other hands-on methods, bridges the gap between theory and practice. Replacing traditional academic assessments with hands-on projects, simulations, and other active learning strategies, building students entrepreneurial skill sets.

Support for educators is equally essential. Faculty development programs should offer tools and training to integrate emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and resilience-building practices into their teaching. Cultivating inner well-being in both educators and students strengthens students' capacity to lead with empathy, self-awareness, and a strong sense of purpose. Finally, advancing SIE needs investing in faculty-led research through funding, academic recognition, and support for cross-departmental collaboration. These efforts, when taken together, can help embed SIE more deeply and sustainably across higher education systems.

6.2. For Social Innovators

Although this primary focus of this study is on higher education, its findings have a direct relevance to social innovators in practice. Research on social innovation competencies is crucial to prepare learners as it provides evidence based insights into the skills, mindsets, and behaviors needed for innovators to create social impact. Building these competencies that are essential for navigating the complexity and uncertainty inherent in addressing social problems.

Training programs for social innovators often emphasize technical or organizational capacity building frameworks, but often neglect the personal and emotional development that underpin effective long term success. Continued research on social innovation competencies, grounded in emotional intelligence, building resiliency, and systems understanding can lead to meaningful social change. By identifying these competencies, social innovation ecosystem actors like Ashoka, Skoll, Catalyst Now, among others can better prepare social innovators for the challenges faced by a changing global environment.

Embedding these competencies in both formal higher education environments and informal training programs for aspiring and growing social ventures, will support the success of individual social ventures. In addition, the training will strengthen the resilience and adaptability of social venture teams' ability to navigate uncertainty and maintain well-being in constantly changing environments.

6.3. For Policymakers

As outlined in this report, cultivating the next generation of changemakers requires a structural shift not only in the content being taught, but in the underlying structures, incentives, and support systems that sustain it. Developing students' inner well-being, systems thinking capacity, and ability to navigate complex challenges calls for enabling educational policies, institutional culture, and broader policy changes.

Policymakers play an important role in creating these enabling environments that reinforce and sustain these educational shifts. These include fostering partnerships between universities, businesses, and social enterprises to provide mentorship, internships, and real-world project opportunities that connect learning to practice. International collaboration among educators and institutions can accelerate effective practices and foster a global movement for purpose-driven education.

At the same time, educators must be empowered and supported to lead this shift. Developing specialized training programs, encouraging interdisciplinary program design, and supporting innovation in teaching and research for SIE strategies Policymakers can catalyze this by investing in educator development through grants and awards, incentivising regional or national strategies, and allocating resources to support social innovators.

Finally, financial and regulatory mechanisms should align with the broader goals of social impact. Targeted funding support, tax incentives, and grants for social enterprise development to accelerate the growth of social ventures. In addition, grants and faculty fellowships and research —particularly on the intersection of pedagogy, well-being, and social innovation can expand the knowledge base and signal that social innovation education is a societal priority.

6.4. Limitations

The limitations to this study include the geographic scope, limited sample size, and stakeholder perspectives and the subjectivity in analysis. Slightly more educator insights come from higher-income countries (4 Europe, 5 North America), which may not reflect the challenges and

perspectives of the global majority adequately (4 LATAM, 1 APAC, 2 Africa). This may limit the generalizability of the findings to the global majority institutions. The sample size is relatively small which constrains the depth of perspectives represented. The study focuses on the perspectives from educators, with students and social innovators not included in this study. While thematic analysis is inherently interpretive, having two researchers conduct independent coding helped to enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings across the participants.

6.5. Future Research Directions

Although social innovation education has expanded over the last two decades, further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches and assess the long term outcomes (Shabbir, 2024). There is a need for more systematic and longitudinal studies in social entrepreneurship education (Rawhouser et al., 2017; Saebi et al., 2019) to evaluate the long term impact on both the students and the broader contribution to the field. As with any academic program, research may include longitudinal studies of social innovation programs on graduates' career trajectory and social venture startup and successes post graduation to validate the value of the educational offering.

Future research should investigate the integration of inner development “soft skills” and technical “hard skills” influences social innovation preparation. Qualitative or quantitative studies that examinethe integration of inner development skills (empathy, self-awareness, resilience, and reflective thinking) that enhances both personal well-being and effectiveness of emerging social innovators. Research on technical skills (financial management, capacity building, and operations) within systems thinking frameworks can reinforce the benefits of holistic, interdisciplinary approach of incorporating systems thinking in SIE programs.

Future research should also use mixed-methods approaches to strengthen the evidence base for SIE. While interviews can help identify and explore key competencies, developing assessment tools to measure well-being and systems thinking competencies would provide valuable quantitative insights. Triangulating these methods can offer a fuller picture of how SIE programs prepare learners for real-world social innovation.

Practitioner informed insights are important to guiding the evolution of SIE curriculum to better prepare students for the complexity of the work. For example, interviewing students in social innovation courses can provide valuable feedback on how these competencies are enhancing the curriculum and contributing to their readiness for a career in social impact.

As a next step, our research will include interviews with social innovators across diverse geographies and cultural contexts to determine which competencies they found most critical and those which were lacking when launching and sustaining their social ventures. These insights from practitioners will play a pivotal role in reshaping the SIE curriculum for the next generation of changemakers.

By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a more robust, evidence informed research for advancing SIE and practice.

6.6. Call to Action: Educators as Architects of Transformative Change

As we prepare the next generation of changemakers to tackle the world's most pressing problems, we must move beyond the traditional teaching pedagogy and embrace experiential learning models that foster transformative growth. Second, to truly equip students for the future, we must teach them not only to understand complex systems, but to understand themselves.

Educators have both a profound opportunity and the responsibility to integrate emotional competencies including building empathy, embracing resiliency, self-awareness, and reflective thinking as a core of social innovation education. These inner capacities are not just soft skills, but are foundational to prepare for an unknown future that promises to be more complex and challenging. Without them, collaboration fails. With them, social innovators are capable of building trust, sustaining purpose, and engaging in long term efforts towards systematic transformation.

Now is the time for a paradigm shift in education. We must reimagine not just what we teach, but how we teach – embracing pedagogies that cultivate both the head and heart. Let us champion an educational approach that prepares students not only to lead social ventures, but lead with integrity, compassion, and a deep sense of commitment to improving the lives of others – in their schools, in their faith based institutions, in their communities and beyond.

The future of education, and indeed the future of our communities, depends on our willingness to embrace change. By embracing emotional competencies and systems thinking into the fabric of our learning, educators can ignite the kind of leadership our world urgently needs.

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide for Educators and Scholars on Core Competencies in Social Innovation Education

I. Introduction and Welcome

We will structure the conversation around four key areas of competencies identified through our literature review:

1. **Social business skills**
2. **Systems change and systems thinking**
3. **Interpersonal competencies**
4. **Emotional competencies**

Throughout this interview, we will be asking for your input on how these competencies are integrated into your teaching practices, along with how you define and support their development in your students.

II. Core Competencies

1. Personal Background

Purpose: To understand the interviewee's background and the lens they use to approach Social Innovation Education (SIE). This will help contextualize their responses and insights.

- **What is your role within social entrepreneurship education?**
- **What kind of changes do you want to see in the core values and beliefs in students after completing your programme?**
- **What is the key pedagogy (pedagogies) that you use in your social innovation programme? (e.g. experiential learning, case-based learning, etc.)**

2. Core Competencies

Purpose: To understand the core competencies you focus on in your social entrepreneurship programme and how they are integrated into your teaching.

- **What core competencies do you emphasize in your programme related to business/running social ventures ?**
    - What specific skills and knowledge are central to your curriculum?

- **What core competencies related to systems thinking or systems change do you cover in your programme?**
    - How do you prepare students to understand and engage with complex social and environmental issues?

- **What social and relationship competencies are covered in your programme?**
  - How do you prepare students to collaborate effectively and engage with diverse stakeholders?

- **What emotional competencies are emphasized in your programme?**
  - How do you support students in developing emotional resilience and adaptability?

Earlier, you mentioned the key pedagogy (or pedagogies) you use in your social innovation program. **Could you now walk me through how these pedagogies, tools, or resources specifically support the development of the core competencies we've discussed?**

3. Challenges in SEE

- Are there any particular skills, knowledge areas, or support systems that you feel are missing from your current programme?
- Are there any particular skills, knowledge areas to improve knowledge gaps in social entrepreneurship education?
- What additional competencies or focus areas would you like to incorporate into your teaching to better address these gaps?
- Reflecting on the core values and beliefs you aim to instill in your students (recall from your answer in the first part of this interview), how well do the current competencies in your programme contribute to achieving these changes?

Note: For each category, ask their definition, What has been taught and How it has been taught?
- **Definition:** How do you define this competency in the context of your programme?
- **Content:** What specific topics or skills related to this competency have been taught?
- **Methodology:** How have these topics or skills been taught in your/programme?

Appendix B: Definitions of Social Innovation

Select Multilateral Definitions of Social Innovation

Organization	Publication	Definition
European Commission	This is European Social Innovation (2010). Definition building on the Open Book of Social Innovation (Murray, Calulier-Grice, and Mulgan, 2010)	New ideas that work to address pressing unmet needs. We simply describe it as innovations that are both social in their ends and in their means. Social innovations are new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations.

International Labor Organization	Social innovation approaches to tackle labour exploitation and promote decent work in agriculture (n.d.) ILO and EURICSE.	Literature review identified 18 definitions. Commonalities included the interactions with different stakeholders and the creation of something new. Report also emphasises the inclusion of vulnerable recipients and the creation of partnerships.
OECD	Recommendation of the Council on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation (2022).	Seeks new and cost-effective answers to social and societal problems and refers to new solutions that aim primarily to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities by increasing their well-being as well as their social and economic inclusion. These solutions can be new services, new products and new relationships with stakeholders.
UNDP, Global Centre for Public Service	Social Innovation for Public Service Excellence (2016). Definition building on, Social Innovation: What it is, why it matters, how it can be accelerated (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, and Sanders, 2007).	New ideas that work in meeting social goals
World Bank	Developing Skills in Youth to Solve the World's Most Complex Problems: The Social Innovators' Framework, World Bank	A social innovation canbe a new product, service, technology, or an improvement to the infrastructure or environment, such as roads, schools, street

	Education, Technology & Innovation: SABER-ICT Technical Paper Series (Freeman & Hawkins, 2016).	lighting, open green spaces, crops, water supply, sanitation, and so forth. It can be something unique, Yet it can also involve re-thinking the way things are currently done or re-inventing a process, methodology, or practice, such as adding new features to a product or reconfiguring the supply chain of a service that already exists.

Select Ecosystem Definitions of Social Innovation

Organization	Publication	Definition
Catalyst Now	Catalyst Now Website (accessed 2025)	The dynamic process and practice of co-creating, learning, adapting and deploying effective human solutions to problems, fostering social, environmental and economic progress.
NESTA	Murray, R., Caulier-Grice, J., & Mulgan, G. (2010). The open book of social innovation (Vol. 24). London: Nesta.	New ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations.

Stanford Social Innovation Review	Phills Jr., J. A., Deiglmeier, K., & Miller, D. T. (2008). Rediscovering Social Innovation. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 6(4), 34–43.	A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals.
Skoll Foundation	Skoll Foundation Website (accessed 2025)	The quest to solve a societal problem by applying a novel or reimagined solution that effectively contributes to lasting and systemic social change
Stanford Center on Social Innovation	Sarah A. Soule, Neil Malhotra, & Bernadette Clavier	The process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues in support of social progress.

Select Academic Definitions of Social Innovation

Paper	Definition
Battilana, J., Butler, B., Kimsey, M., Mair, J., Marquis, C., & Seelos, C. (2019). Problem, person and pathway: a framework for social innovators. In Handbook of Inclusive Innovation (pp. 61-74). Edward Elgar Publishing.	Innovation with the intent to address social problems

Battilana, J., Butler, B., Kimsey, M., Mair, J., Marquis, C., & Seelos, C. (2019). Problem, person and pathway: a framework for social innovators. In Handbook of Inclusive Innovation (pp. 61-74). Edward Elgar Publishing.	Innovation with the intent to address social problems
Battilana, J., Butler, B., Kimsey, M., Mair, J., Marquis, C., & Seelos, C. (2019). Problem, person and pathway: a framework for social innovators. In Handbook of Inclusive Innovation (pp. 61-74). Edward Elgar Publishing.	As a novel process or product that intends to generate more effective and just solutions to address complex social problems, for collective gain
Bitzer, V., & Hamann, R. (2014). The business of social and environmental innovation. In The business of social and environmental innovation: New frontiers in Africa (pp. 3-24). Cham: Springer International Publishing.	Innovative approaches of dealing with social problems “for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals” (Phills et al., 2008, p. 39).
Cajaiba-Santana, G. (2014). Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework. Technological forecasting and social change, 82, 42-51.	New ideas manifested in social actions leading to social change and proposing new alternatives and new social practices for social groups. The distinguishing feature…lies firstly in newness and secondly in the inherent purposeful actions oriented towards a desired result.
Logue, D. (2019). Theories of social innovation. Edward Elgar Publishing.	Offers a thorough treatment of the many definitions in circulation, with a focus on the creation of social value and public good.

Molecke, G., & Pache, A. C. (2019). How do we know when social innovation works? A review and contingency model of social impact assessment. Handbook of inclusive innovation, 83-105.	Novel ways to address societal challenges and ultimately aim at creating social good by improving the condition of individuals, communities, and the planet (Kroeger and Weber, 2014; Venkataraman, 1997).
Krlev, G., Dey, P. (2023). Social Innovation. In: List, R.A., Anheier, H.K., Toepler, S. (eds) International Encyclopedia of Civil Society. Springer, Cham.	Using innovative approaches that introduce new combinations, practices, products, and services to create beneficial outcomes and impacts for society and the environment.
Nicholls, A., & Murdock, A. (2012). The nature of social innovation. In Social innovation: Blurring boundaries to reconfigure markets (pp. 1-30). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.	Simultaneously the production of new ideas and new structures (Scott 2007) and a process of recontextualization within socially (re)constructed norms of the public good, justice, and equity.
Phills Jr., J. A., Deiglmeier, K., & Miller, D. T. (2008). Rediscovering Social Innovation. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 6(4), 34–43.	A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals.
Seelos, C., & Mair, J. (2020). Social innovation: Specifying pathways for impact. In Research Handbook of Responsible Management (pp. 624-639). Edward Elgar Publishing.	Innovations targeting fundamental societal problems that businesses or the public sector are unable or unwilling to address effectively

Sinclair, S., & Baglioni, S. (2024). Introduction: Social Innovation and Social Policy: A Critical Relationship. In Handbook on Social Innovation and Social Policy (pp. 1-14). Edward Elgar Publishing.	Novel ideas and empowering initiatives that are applied to effect sustained social value.
Tracey, P., & Stott, N. (2017). Social Innovation: A Window on Alternative Ways of Organizing and Innovating. Innovation, 19(1), 51-60.	A broad range of organizational and interorganizational activity that is ostensibly designed to address the most deep-rooted 'problems' of society such as poverty, inequality and environmental degradation.

Source: The definitions presented in these tables are drawn from multilateral organizations, ecosystem actors, and academic sources from the Mapping the Social Innovation Terminology Landscape Working Paper prepared for the Government Council on Social Innovation (GCSI), April 2025, by Cynthia Rayner, Kevin Miner, and Marya Besharov.

Appendix C: Pedagogical Methods in Social Innovation Education

Method	Skill Development	Examples/Resources
Experiential Learning	• Research skills, Communication Strategies • Critical Analysis	• University of Oxford Map the System • Collaborative online international learning (COIL) project • Undergraduate Research • Study Abroad
Project Based Learning	• Data Collection • Critical Analysis • Stakeholder Engagement • Collaboration	• Capstone Projects • Consulting Engagements • Fieldwork • Student-run food rescue program

Service Learning	Social Innovation for Public Service Excellence (2016). Definition building on, Social Innovation: What it is, why it matters, how it can be accelerated (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, and Sanders, 2007).	New ideas that work in meeting social goals
World Bank	• Civic engagement • Reflection • Teamwork • Empathy-building • Collaboration	• Community Projects • Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle • DEAL model • Structured Reflection Exercises • Organizations: Coalition for Service Learning , Int'l Assoc. Research, Service Learning and Community Engagement, National Youth Leadership Council, Campus Compact
Case Method	• Critical thinking • Presentation skills • Data analysis • Apply theory to practice	• Full Case Studies (Sage, HBR, Skoll Centrel, etc.) • Mini Case Studies (Duke U CASE, USD Social Impact • The Case Centre • CLADEA BALAS Case Consortium for Latin America
Interdisciplinary & Co-Curricular Learning	• Internships • Competitions • University-based incubators /accelerators • Starting a social venture • Community projects • Student run organizations	

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