



Teaching social business to Thai students: A case of LGBTIQ+ social business

Nattavud Pimpa

College of Management, Mahidol University, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the learning experiences of a group of undergraduate business students from a Thai business school in a social business course. The key point to examine in this study is learning and teaching approaches for social business education that can promote understanding of gender diversity. To understand the experiences of stakeholders in social business education, a qualitative approach was adopted wherein students, teaching staff and social entrepreneurs engaged with the researcher in a real-time, hands-on social business environment. We collected secondary data from assignments, feedback, and presentations from students and their social business coaches. We also collected primary data in the form of personal interviews with two social entrepreneurs who coached students in this course. The results suggest that the development of pedagogy for social business requires multidisciplinary collaboration and codesign among course coordinators, teachers, social business, and students. We also summarized four appropriate learning approaches, LGBTIQ + social business, in the Thai higher education context: advocacy, problem-based, research-based and practical-operational approaches. We suggest that social business should also be taught by academic staff and industry representatives to help students in the learning process. This study also suggests that a student-centered approach can help students synergize social impacts with the financial returns of social business by adopting inquiry-based activities, role plays, and talking with LGBTIQ + social entrepreneurs.

1. Introduction

The term "social business education" is used to describe the process of learning how organizations can use their resources to benefit society and the environment without jeopardizing their bottom line. Motivated by altruism and a sense of duty, social entrepreneurs set out to improve the lives of those in need [1,2]. Therefore, they take radical and novel measures to alter society and address issues such as unemployment, poverty, and sexism [1,3,4].

As identified by Kickul et al. [5], social business must be financially and economically sustainable and environmentally conscious, and social entrepreneurs must deal with conflict between business and social impact. The design process of social business education must be well balanced and cover issues such as corporate social responsibility, sustainable business practices, impact investing, entrepreneurial processes, and other related social topics.

While there may be many shared experiences between commercial and social entrepreneurs during the learning process, instructors should be aware of certain topics such as business and management or financial management. These business courses may be particularly unsettling for social entrepreneurs [6].

E-mail address: nattavud.pim@mahidol.ac.th.

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There are business schools offering social business education without distinguishing it from mainstream business courses. Such business schools may fail to provide students and professionals with the skills, knowledge, and mindset required to build, launch, and manage successful social enterprises. Indeed, social business education requires a different method of teaching and learning from generic business courses. Social business education programs must help students gain and develop a range of skills that are essential for creating business and managing successful social causes. Some of the key skills developed through social business education are presented in Table 1.

The pedagogical task of imparting education in social entrepreneurship presents a unique challenge, largely owing to the discipline’s inherent dualistic essence. It necessitates simultaneous management of both financial profitability and social impact, a balance that differentiates it from conventional commercial enterprises [14]. With regard to social business programs facilitated by business schools, academic faculty typically possess a blend of managerial experience (encompassing organization, human resources, and strategy) and a background in social organizations, nongovernmental entities, or community-centric work. Moreover, specializations in accounting, finance, and moral philosophy are also frequently observed among the professorial staff within these business schools [15].

In addition to academic specialization, some institutions also focus on hands-on experience in entrepreneurship for students. Some of the most useful methods of social business education that help students learn more about social companies are active learning, learning by doing, and experiential learning [16]. Universities can promote social business education by providing an environment in which students and social entrepreneurs can collaborate effectively.

Students benefit from social business education because they are able to put their acquired expertise, understanding, and information to use long after they have graduated. The social impacts and financial returns of business can be well managed if social entrepreneurs are prepared by higher education institutions (HEIs). In most HEIs, social business education sits in general management or entrepreneurship and innovation programs. The gaps in learning and teaching specific skills for social entrepreneurs should be investigated. More importantly, HEIs must play a role in training the next generation of social entrepreneurs and social champions by providing them with strong knowledge, social and business skills and with incentives.

1.1. Key distinctions

In the academic discourse surrounding business that serves societal good, the terminologies of "social entrepreneurship," "social enterprise," and "social business" are frequently used. While these terms often overlap, they have distinct connotations and should not be used interchangeably.

Social Entrepreneurship: Social entrepreneurship primarily refers to the process and activities undertaken by individuals or groups to identify and address social issues through the application of innovative, entrepreneurial principles. It is characterized by the identification of systemic gaps and the creation of a social value proposition to fill these gaps. Social entrepreneurs are often trail-blazers who challenge the status quo and change the way society functions, addressing issues such as poverty, lack of education, environmental degradation, etc. [17].

Social Enterprise: A social enterprise, on the other hand, is the organizational form or entity that emerges from social entrepreneurship. It serves as the vehicle through which the social entrepreneur operates. A social enterprise can adopt various legal forms, but the common feature is the purposeful integration of social and environmental aims with business methods. It generates revenues through trading activities, but unlike conventional businesses, the primary aim is to reinvest profits to further its social or environmental goals rather than distributing them to shareholders [18].

Social Business: Social business is a subtype of a social enterprise, a term popularized by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. It refers to a business created to address a social problem where the investors/owners can gradually recoup the money invested, but cannot take any dividend beyond that point. The company’s surplus remains in the business for expansion and improvement, or is used to start new social businesses. While it can make a profit, the primary goal is to achieve a social objective. In this sense, social business represents a nuanced model that prioritizes social impact while maintaining economic sustainability [19].

It is worth noting that the three concepts, despite their distinctions, are interconnected, where social entrepreneurship can be seen

Table 1
Key skills from the social business education programs.

Skills	Definitions
Problem-solving	Social business education teaches students how to identify and analyze social problems, and how to develop and implement effective solutions [7,8].
Leadership	Students learn how to be ethical and effective leaders who are able to inspire and motivate others to achieve their goals [9,10].
Financial Management	Understanding the financial aspects of running a business is essential in social business education, including budgeting, forecasting, and impact measurement [11].
Social Marketing	Understanding how to effectively market a social enterprise and build a brand that resonates with customers is an important aspect of social business education.
Innovation	Students learn how to think creatively and innovatively to develop unique solutions to social problems [12].
Sustainability	Social business education emphasizes the importance of creating sustainable solutions that have long-term positive impacts on communities and the environment [13].
Collaboration and Partnership Building	Effective collaboration and partnership building skills are essential for creating successful social enterprises that bring together the resources and expertise of multiple stakeholders [6].

as the innovative process, social enterprise as the organizational manifestation of that process, and social business as a particular enterprise model emphasizing social benefits over profit maximization.

1.2. Gender diversity issues for social entrepreneurs

A number of studies on gender diversity attest to the positive effects of gender diversity on organizations and management, including higher productivity [20], greater critical thinking and self-efficacy [21], and more originality and novel ideas [22]. Having established the benefits of gender diversity, inequality and exclusion remain problematic in certain industries and organizations.

At this stage, we understand that gender issues can simply be certain challenges and matters faced by people because of their gender identity, which is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves internally. This self-understanding might align with the sex assigned to them at birth, or it might not. This is not interchangeable with the acronym LGBTIQ+, which mainly focuses on whom someone is attracted to. For instance, "L" stands for lesbian (a woman attracted to other women), while "B" stands for bisexual (a person who is attracted to both males and females). While gender is about one's inner sense of self as male, female, or something else, LGBTIQ + relates more to whom someone is attracted to and includes some gender identities.

In 2006, a group of international lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) legal scholars and activists proposed the Yogyakarta Principles, which acknowledged the persistent "violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization, and prejudice" faced by LGBTIQ + people around the world and articulated a vision for how international human rights principles should be applied to counter these heinous social forces and promote full inclusion. However, LGBTIQ + people around the world continue to battle for full realization of these rights and face persisting gaps in terms of physical security, economic well-being, and general health. A study on LGBTIQ + entrepreneurship by GEM [23] confirms that the sexual identities of entrepreneurs are essential aspects of their daily business lives in terms of their entrepreneurial identities and motivations, key success factors and the barriers they face.

Gender diversity among entrepreneurs has recently become an important topic among researchers in entrepreneurship and innovation. Various aspects, such as the lack of support for LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs in some countries, social acceptance in the hardline business establishment, hetero -inequality in entrepreneurship, and poor access to resources, have all been highlighted. LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs are more likely to encounter disadvantages than their straight counterparts [23].

The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ and other non-heteronormative people in global society is a fundamental human rights issue and a prerequisite for sustainable development. According to Newman et al. [24], LGBTIQ + people in Thailand have worse life opportunities and health than heterosexual and cisgender people. This includes higher rates of HIV and AIDS, persistent mental health disorders such as depression and suicide, and greater economic insecurity. In their research, Cruz et al. [10] criticized the heteronormative notion of the entrepreneur as male, masculine [25], and heterosexual, and they looked at how this normativity affects the lives of LGBTIQ + business owners.

A study on coming-out experiences among LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs by Germak and Robinson [26] suggested that almost 40 % chose not to self-identify as members of the LGBTQ + community. The reasons that were given were that the entrepreneur's identity was irrelevant to the business or they feared social rejection.

Social business for gender issues in developing countries has increased over the past decades, particularly social businesses that are working on health and access to health care [23]. The various forms of social business organizations promoting rights for LGBTIQ + include community-based, credit union, social firm and microfinance. However, scant literature exists in the area of gender diversity and social business. The International Labor Organization [27] reported that the LGBTIQ + community frequently engaged in social entrepreneurial activities. Reasons for these actions included being excluded from the former workplace, prejudice against LGBTIQ + people, fear of being rejected and other types of indirect discrimination [23].

The nature of social business promoting equality for the LGBTIQ + community differs from generic entrepreneurship or corporate activities. The impact of LGBTIQ + social business defines its importance in the current socioeconomic and political conditions. The development of cross-disciplinary skills is an important component of social entrepreneurs who promote LGBTIQ + rights and gender equity.

While engaging in entrepreneurial activities will enhance economic standing and recognition among the business LGBTIQ + community [27], the prevalence of homo-hysteria and homophobia will decrease over time [23,28]. However, social stigma and adherence to traditional norms continue to make it difficult for LGBTIQ + people with entrepreneurial talents and resources to prosper in business.

1.3. Social business education

Social business tackles specific social issues by adopting business activities as a mean to obtain resources. Social business in developing countries has increased over the past decades [23]. The concept of social business, which seeks to address specific societal challenges through entrepreneurial activities, has seen an uptick in developing nations over recent decades [23]. This growth has underscored the necessity for proficiency in both business and social elements to effectively manage such ventures. Institutions of higher learning, such as universities and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) bodies, find themselves at the forefront of developing innovative methodologies to impart this vital combination of skills and knowledge, thereby fostering social entrepreneurship. This educational landscape is rapidly evolving as new trends and pedagogical practices for social entrepreneur training emerge, presenting fresh hurdles to academia [29].

Higher education institutions (HEIs), social business organizations, and government understand that they must work together to

equip students to solve social and environmental problems that the government has neglected. Similarly, Kummitha and Majumdar [13] looked into university best practices in social-entrepreneurial training programs, but additional research is still required [30], particularly in regard to incorporating gender issues into social business design [31].

.Our study focuses specifically on social business education designed for the LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs, which we define as the pedagogical process that equips individuals with the expertise to establish and operate businesses that respond to socioeconomic and human rights issues (diversity and inclusion) concerning the LGBTIQ + population.

However, the integration of gender issues into social business education remains an under-researched and relatively unknown area of study. Herk [31] underscored the pivotal role played by higher education institutions (HEIs), social business organizations, and governmental bodies in equipping students with the ability to address neglected societal and environmental problems. In parallel, studies by Mueller et al. [7] and Kummitha and Majumdar [13] shed light on effective practices within universities for social-entrepreneurial training programs. However, these studies fall short in addressing the specific needs and challenges of social businesses aimed at promoting equity for the LGBTIQ + community [30].

There are multiple reasons why this subject deserves further exploration. First, as the acceptance and understanding of LGBTIQ + rights continue to progress globally, it is critical for educational programs to mirror this evolution and equip future entrepreneurs with the skills to promote inclusivity. Second, businesses aimed at promoting gender equity might face unique challenges, such as stigmatization or discrimination, which necessitate specialized training and knowledge. Third, an understanding of the unique societal, economic, and human rights issues related to the LGBTIQ + business owners is paramount for the success of such businesses, necessitating tailored education in this area [31]. Lastly, creating successful social businesses that promote gender equity could have a substantial positive impact on this marginalized community, underscoring the need for effective educational programs.

Hence, it is evident that more investigation and emphasis are required to integrate gender considerations into the development of social enterprises and, consequently, the instructional approaches used to train prospective social entrepreneurs in this pivotal domain.

To gain an accurate understanding of social entrepreneurs and their operations, it is crucial to scrutinize their backgrounds, economic contexts, and life experiences. Studies conducted by Galera and Borzaga [8] and Elliot [32] borrowed theoretical frameworks from entrepreneurship research to elucidate this issue. These studies concluded that successful social entrepreneurs tend to exhibit a unique blend of qualities - an ability to translate ideas into actions, high emotional intelligence, and a strong sense of empathy. These attributes are underpinned by robust business acumen, which significantly influences the success of their ventures [1]. However, empirical evidence to support these findings remains scarce.

Wry and York [33] further pointed out certain key traits of social entrepreneurs that are often overlooked in traditional business education, such as the capacity to align convictions of social justice and sustainability with financial goals. In the same vein, Bloemen-Bekx et al. [34] and Entrialgo and Iglesias [35] studied the impact of education on the behavior and attitudes of social entrepreneurs, concluding that these were often molded by informal learning experiences, such as those obtained from family environments, personal experiences, or social persuasion. Given the breadth and depth of social issues related to the LGBTIQ + community - including inclusivity, human rights, health, HIV-Aids, social support, education and training, skill development for LGBTIQ + workers, pride, homo-hysteria, and same-sex marriage - it becomes evident that both formal and informal learning are critical in fostering effective social entrepreneurs.

With the global rise of social businesses, the necessity for a relevant, timely pedagogy that adequately addresses the unique requirements of social entrepreneurs has never been more pronounced. Social business education represents a unique intersection of entrepreneurship education and social issue awareness. This implies that business schools might need to restructure their pedagogical strategies, resources, and content to deliver the necessary entrepreneurial skills, while simultaneously fostering a nuanced understanding of complex social issues among their students.

Consequently, it is not merely about acquiring formal business skills through structured education but also about embracing the experiential wisdom gleaned from informal sources, which, together, culminate in a holistic learning experience for prospective social entrepreneurs. The cultivation of such a comprehensive learning approach will be instrumental in driving the future success of social businesses, particularly those aiming to address the challenges faced by the LGBTIQ + community.

Studies conducted by Bloemen-Bekx et al. [34] and Entrialgo and Iglesias [35] examined the influence of education on the behavioral tendencies and attitudes of social entrepreneurs. Their findings suggest that these elements are often shaped by indirect learning experiences, garnered from familial environments, personal experiences, or societal influences. This observation emphasizes the vast and profound nature of social issues related to the LGBTIQ + community, which include inclusivity, human rights, health and HIV-AIDS awareness, social support, education and training, skill development for LGBTIQ + workers, pride, homo-hysteria, and the recognition of same-sex marriages, among others.

Given the consistent global expansion of social business, the pressing need to devise an apt and contemporary pedagogy that caters to the instructional needs of social entrepreneurs becomes paramount. As social business education is fundamentally a fusion of entrepreneurial education and social issue awareness, business schools may find it necessary to rethink their pedagogical methodologies, materials, and content to ensure that they not only facilitate the acquisition of appropriate entrepreneurial skills but also enhance learners' understanding of intricate social issues.

Despite the fundamental nature of social entrepreneurship being well-understood by social business educators and practitioners alike, the challenge remains to translate this understanding into effective course design and content creation for management education. Daraban [36] highlighted the fact that social business education often demands resources that exceed the confines of traditional academic infrastructures. This poses challenges for business educators in terms of securing funding, establishing collaborations with social enterprises, and ensuring student access to mentorship, incubation, and funding opportunities [37].

While there is an increasing body of teaching resources available on social entrepreneurship and social innovation, it often lacks

cohesion, making it challenging to determine optimal course organization and content inclusion (Blackwood et al., 2012). However, social business courses can be integrated with well-established courses to facilitate the learning of key skills. Consequently, students will be empowered to apply their acquired skills in diverse employment scenarios in the future. This approach ensures that the knowledge gained is versatile and transferable, thereby enriching the learning experience of prospective social entrepreneurs.

Although the nature of social entrepreneurship is clearly understood by social business educators and social entrepreneurs, the impact on how we design courses and course materials remains an important challenge for management educators. Daraban [36] also addressed that social business education often requires resources beyond traditional academic infrastructures. Business educators may face challenges in securing funding, building partnerships with social enterprises, and providing students with access to mentorship, incubation, and funding opportunities [37].

While there is an emerging body of teaching material on social entrepreneurship and social innovation, much of it is fragmented, and so it is not obvious how best to organize courses and what to include in terms of course content [38]. Nevertheless, social business course can be learnt and thought with other well-established courses and learn some key skills. In so doing, students will be able to transfer their skills to future employment in various areas.

2. Objectives

To understand how best to promote social business skills through learning and teaching, the following objectives are set out by the researcher.

- To examine the learning experiences of undergraduate business students from a Thai business school in a social business course.
- To explore teaching approaches for social business education that can promote an understanding of gender diversity.
- To understand the experiences of stakeholders (students, teaching staff, and social entrepreneurs) in the social business education context.
- To identify appropriate learning approaches for LGBTIQ + social business in the Thai higher education context.

This research is crucial due to its methodology, novelty, and relevance. First, it explores a subject that has been underexplored in the literature: the perspectives of undergraduate business students who have taken a social business course. Improving the success of social business courses requires a deeper knowledge of how students experience and interact with these programs.

The purpose of the research is to examine methods of instruction that foster students' appreciation for gender diversity in the field of social business. This is vital since gender diversity is a pressing problem in today's society, and training future leaders to tackle gender-related obstacles in social enterprises is a must.

This study addresses a void in the literature by shedding light on the evolution of pedagogy for social business education. It emphasizes the significance of multidisciplinary collaboration and codesign between course coordinators, instructors, social enterprises, and students in the development of effective teaching strategies.

The study also addresses the unique context of Thai higher education and recommends appropriate learning approaches for LGBTIQ + social enterprises. This context-specific emphasis provides educators and policy-makers in Thailand with valuable insights and may inform social business education practices in similar contexts.

3. Method

This study aims to understand and optimize learning and teaching strategies by collating the experiences of students and teachers in social business courses. All students from whom we collected data were also in the leadership program of our university. They consider themselves youth leaders who will work in the community in the future.

To achieve these goals, a phenomenography research approach was adopted in this study. Ontologically, phenomenography holds that "an individual cannot experience without something being experienced" [39]. This approach helps researchers focus on the life experiences of the participants in this study and analyze the varied ways in which individuals experience something or think about something. This study seeks to explore the many different ways in which students, business educators, and social entrepreneurs try to make sense of the world around them and interpret and define social business activities. The researcher aims to understand their experience and how they conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of social business, discern patterns of understanding in nonnumerical language and describe differences and patterns in the way people understand or ascribe meaning in the world around them [40]. This paper followed this concept to explore patterns of learning among students in the social entrepreneurship education postgraduate program.

This approach is novel in business education research since it involves students as active contributors to the research process by analyzing their feedback and assignments, acknowledges their agency and empowers them to shape educational practices. This participatory approach recognizes students as experts in their own learning and encourages their active involvement in improving the educational system.

More importantly, students' feedback and assignments often contain detailed and specific information about their learning experiences. This level of granularity allows researchers to explore and analyze the nuances of students' perceptions, learning experiences, challenges faced, and the impact of various educational interventions while studying social business. Such detailed data can help identify patterns, trends, and individual differences among students.

Due to the naturalistic approach of qualitative research in this study, the 3-step approach was implemented in the data management

(planning, collection, and analysis) to mitigate bias. All questions in the reflections for students are open-ended questions. It prevents students from merely concurring or disagreeing with a query about their experiences in social business course by requiring them to contemplate and elaborate on their responses (agreement bias). At the second step, data coding, two research assistants also conducted data coding and we compared our codes in order to examine the interpretations of the data (confirmation bias). At the final stage, the researcher shared the interpretation and key results to LGBTIQ + business owners who engaged in this project at early stage, then asked them to provide feedback on the conclusions. This step helps us to reduce conclusions based on our own cultural lens (cultural bias).

4. Key informants and data collection

4.1. Step 1

Data for this study were secondary data derived from a social business course in the form of students' reflections. This course was offered in the 2020 academic year by the researcher. At that semester, students were assigned to work on their online weekly reflections. Each week, they were asked to answer four questions: (1) What was the new social business idea that you learned this week? (2) How did you learn it? (3) What should be improved to help you understand the topic? (4) Please reflect upon your understanding of social, employment, or economic issues among the LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs you have learned about. Additionally, in the last week, we asked students to write an analysis of their involvement with the LGBTIQ + community while doing this project.

At that semester, 24 students enrolled in a social business course as an elective subject in a Master of Management degree (Table 2). The researcher deliberately selected participants who possess specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research topic (purposive sampling) because key informants could provide valuable insights into their learning experiences within the course. By selecting this specific group, the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the students' reflections, which can offer unique perspectives on the effectiveness of the program, the challenges faced, and the overall impact on their personal and professional development.

At the end of the semester, when we informed all students of the results of the course, we contacted them and sought permission to use their reflection assignments. This step is important since the researcher demonstrates ethical considerations and respect for their autonomy. Participants were asked to voluntarily agree (with no remuneration) to participate in the study, and they were informed that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. All procedures followed the ethical guidelines defined by Mahidol University's Standard Operating Procedures of the Ethics Committee. All participants were over 18 years old and completed the entire interview process. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

While all students were asked to complete the reflection, it is important to assess the quality and relevance of the data before selecting it as the key set of data for the research project. Consider factors such as the completeness, depth, and thoughtfulness of the reflections. If some reflections are incomplete or lack substance, it may be necessary to exclude them from the key set of data to maintain the integrity and validity of the study.

While the sample size is relatively small (24 participants), it can still provide valuable qualitative data, especially when exploring rich and detailed reflections. The insights gained from these participants' experiences can contribute to the broader understanding of social business courses and inform future improvements or adaptations.

4.2. Step 2

The researcher also designed this project as a work-integrated learning project. Therefore, two social entrepreneurs from the LGBTIQ + social business organizations engaged with the project team from the design stage to the final stage. They gave lectures twice and coached students on the project analysis throughout the semester. At the end of the project, each social entrepreneur was interviewed to define (1) key business activities, (2) resources, (3) business model, (4) social impacts, (5) innovation and (6) learning experiences. The researcher also shared research findings with them and asked for the interpretation of the results and feedback on how to improve social business skills as well as awareness of gender diversity in the future class. Table 2 provides the details and backgrounds of the two social entrepreneurs in this study.

Table 2
Basic Information of Social Entrepreneur Coaches in this study.

Sexual Orientation	Years of experiences	Details of Social Business	Aims of Social Business
Bisexual	14	a social business that operates a network of clinics offering LGBTIQ + -friendly healthcare. This business provides various healthcare services tailored for the LGBTIQ + community, including mental health counseling, hormone replacement therapy for transgender individuals, HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention services. The business model could be structured to ensure that these services are affordable, especially for those in the community who may not have adequate insurance or financial resources.	Health
Gay	13	This business provides diversity and inclusion consulting services. They work with corporations, schools, and other organizations to develop and implement policies that protect LGBTIQ + employees or students from discrimination, create more inclusive environments, and promote representation.	Equality and Health

5. Data analysis

The initial phase of the data analysis process required meticulous scrutiny of each document. This involved several rounds of reading and identifying the primary points presented in each. The researcher thoroughly examined each student's assignments and reflections, succinctly summarizing the salient "issues and themes."

Data organization and coding took center stage in the subsequent phase of our analytical process. This process began with an exhaustive review of all available transcripts and notes, encompassing every single word, phrase, and sentence. Each piece of text was painstakingly read and reread, with the researcher meticulously discerning patterns, recurring ideas, and emerging themes.

The elements that bore thematic similarity were subsequently grouped together, marking the initiation of our coding process. Each group or 'code' symbolized a unique idea or theme, as identified from the transcripts and notes. This included clusters such as common responses, repeated ideas, shared experiences, or similar perceptions.

The process of coding was carried out systematically using both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding was used to classify data based on preexisting ideas or hypotheses. Inductive coding allowed for new themes to emerge directly from the data.

Each of these coded groups constituted a distinct part of our codified structure—a structured framework that streamlined and simplified our data analysis. This structure facilitated a more focused and detailed exploration of the data. It helped us discern patterns, compare and contrast ideas, and understand the relationships between different themes, thereby enabling a more thorough and insightful analysis of the data.

The third phase entailed reordering the previously established groups after an additional round of reading. The goal was to discern "dimensions of variance in meaning" across the transcripts. This iterative process involved continually comparing and contrasting the groups and the overall interpretation of the transcripts and notes. Through this method, patterns and correlations within the data were identified and analyzed, providing insightful and meaningful results.

The chosen data analysis methodologies were rooted in an overarching aim to enhance the rigor and transparency of the study. There are several reasons that underpin our choice of data analysis methodologies, and they largely pertain to their ability to enhance the depth, clarity, and reliability of the generated insights.

5.1. Coding

In the initial phase, multiple rounds of reading and re-reading were employed to ensure a thorough comprehension of the data. This iterative process, although time-consuming, allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the data completely, ensuring no valuable information was overlooked.

The research team adopted both deductive and inductive coding methodologies in the data organization and coding phase. This process provides a balanced and comprehensive analysis. Deductive coding, based on pre-existing ideas or hypotheses, offered a focused, theory-driven perspective, allowing the researcher to probe specific aspects of the data. On the other hand, inductive coding fostered an open-ended, exploratory approach. This enabled the emergence of new, unforeseen themes directly from the data, thus capturing its complexity and nuance.

Coding process started from the development of codes from the interview. Data can be an iterative process, which involved identifying the recurring patterns or themes in the data. In this case, since four themes have been identified: Advocacy approach, problem-based approach, research-based approach, and Practical-operational teaching-learning approach, we could begin by assigning each of these the following code.

Advocacy Approach: This could include instances where interviewees mention the importance of actively promoting or advocating for a specific LGBTIQ + activities in business, and in the learning process. Advocacy can be done through both business and non-business learning (i.e. campaigning, lobbying, or other active). Those under these points in relation to learning were coded under this theme. The specific code is 'ADA'

Problem-based Approach: This theme would cover all mentions of learning techniques that involve the discussion of problems from the LGBTIQ + community and clients, and learning by solving it. Any discussion of problem-solving activities, real-world social and gender diversity issue resolution, etc., would be included here. The specific code is 'PBA'.

Research-based Approach: Any mention of learning through conducting research, analyzing consumer and LGBTIQ + data, or otherwise engaging in scientific investigation would fall under this theme. This could include both primary and secondary research methods. The specific code is 'RBA'.C.

Practical-operational Teaching-Learning Approach: This theme encompasses all references to learning through hands-on experience, practical application of theoretical knowledge, and direct operation or execution of tasks. The specific code is 'POTL'.

6. Findings

We identify four fundamental elements and approaches in teaching that can be used as a framework for fostering social business skills.

6.1. Theme 1: advocacy approach

By focusing on gender equality as a social cause for their business, students in this course were supposed to understand how gender discrimination impacts life and opportunities in life among members of the LGBTIQ + community. They were assigned to discuss

discrimination against LGBTIQ + people and how the business community can support the issue with two social entrepreneurs. Advocacy for the community was raised by both social entrepreneurs as key activities for social business. Advocacy is embedded as a layer of social business activities and is related to gender diversity.

Most participants summarized the key points on entrepreneurship and social issues that a common focus of social entrepreneurship is bringing attention to pressing social problems. In this situation, advocacy helps the general public understand the issues. Participants identified that engaging in ‘conversation on advocacy’ with both social entrepreneurs helps them share their ideas, opinions, and concerns with the non-LGBTIQ + community. Additionally, advocacy serves to promote and preserve their fundamental human rights and raise awareness of sensitive issues such as inequality, gender, and freedom and how they need to be solved by business.

More importantly, social entrepreneurship is about creating change, and advocacy can be an important part of that process. By advocating for policy changes or social reforms, social entrepreneurs can drive the change they want to see in the world.

In the class (week 3), students discussed the purpose of social and gender advocacy with the social entrepreneurs to understand the integration of business and social actions. Steps in bringing advocacy to the classroom included (1) selecting the issues, (2) defining people and key influencers, (3) designing and managing business dialogs with LGBTIQ + people and social entrepreneurs and (4) following up with policies and management. Some points from these reflections are presented below.

“This week, I learned that social entrepreneurs engage in advocacy for the LGBTIQ + community when they want to impact decisions made by political, economics or social institutions. The two social entrepreneurs agreed that their goals included empowering LGBTIQ + people to exercise their rights and improve their well-being.”

“We learned how to communicate and create impacts from the two social entrepreneurs who dedicated their time to coach us in this subject”.

Two social entrepreneurs who coached the students also brought advocacy to the learning activities for student leaders. Both agreed that advocacy can help social entrepreneurs build the credibility of a social business and related activities by demonstrating the importance of the social issue it is addressing and the impact of its work. This can help attract more customers, investors, and partners to the social business.

“I suggested the students to try online advocacy for LGBTIQ + causes and activities. The nature of advocacy is fresh and relevant. Some students came up with interesting strategies for online social campaign.”

When the advocacy approach was implemented (in the learning design, activity and outcomes), both students and teachers understood the necessity of a clear path to advocate for the LGBTIQ + community and business activities to support them. Data from the students also confirm the positive transition from traditional lectures to the adoption of advocacy as a key learning activity for them. Difficulties in following advocacy steps possibly resulted from different interpretations by students and tutors toward self-directed learning in social business education.

When practicing advocacy, both teachers and academics demonstrated how a specific method of teaching, carried out within the classroom, provided a model for critical learning in social business by combining the practices of critical pedagogy and education leadership. Their actions also defined the ‘reach’ and ‘influence’ of social businesses and their social missions. One coach tried to identify views on positive and negative aspects of advocacy in social business education.

“Although all students are leaders in their field or area of study, they may not be familiar with advocacy. Mission creep occurs when advocacy causes social businesses to take on responsibilities outside of their original goal statement. Their effectiveness is diminished, and they may have trouble achieving their goals as a result.”

At the final stage, the students were requested to assess the impact of their ideas via the advocacy campaigns on LGBTIQ + stakeholders. They reflected on the benefits of skill development and research and analysis, further discussed under Theme 3. Adopting the advocacy approach early in the semester prepared the students for the next learning approach.

In sum, teaching students in the social business course about advocacy can increase their understanding on how to inform the issues to the public, increase public awareness of social business, and the problems they are attempting to solve. Advocates can aid social companies in gaining the support, money, and resources they require by raising their profile and publicizing their work.

6.2. Theme 2: problem-based approach

Problem-based learning (PBL) is useful for social entrepreneurs, particularly critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities, by engaging with real-world social problems. Most students refer to ‘learning and understanding’ issues such as access to finance, pivoting for social business, and marketing for social business from the PBL activities.

Rather than teaching relevant material and asking the students to apply their knowledge to solve problems, students were asked to ‘be in an LGBTIQ + scenario’ and then identify business and social obstacles. This approach helps a number of students who may not be familiar with the daily life of LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs engage with the problem and then seek proper solutions with the assigned social business coach. This learning process helps students engage with social business processes, negotiate with different stakeholders, and design a proper business solution.

A PBL approach can also assist in the processes of creating meaning and building personal interpretations of social business management based on experiences and interactions with other stakeholders in the LGBTIQ + community. All students reflect that the first step of PBL, identifying real-world social problems for LGBTIQ + social entrepreneurs, is the most challenging step if they do not

have a background on gender issues and social business problems. PBL, thus, is useful to set a strong ground for novice students. One example is that the students also develop the PBL approach by two complex project questions.

1. What are the alternative business models that promote LGBTIQ + conditions in Thailand?
2. What resources and networks are required to build a sustainable gender-based social business?

PBL can assist students in assessing their learning experiences through reflections. This is somewhat similar to Piaget's constructivist learning theory that learners construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences (in this case, problems). This theory advocates for an active learning approach in which students are encouraged to learn by doing rather than simply absorbing information passively. This is reflected in the method of placing students in the shoes of LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs. By 'being in an LGBTIQ + scenario', students are compelled to confront real-world social and business obstacles, thus building their understanding through the construction of their own experience and problem-solving. These are some views from the participants.

"I knew nothing or very little about transgender or lesbian entrepreneurs in Thailand but after a brief introduction, rushing to investigate problems and coaching from my teacher, I started to understand the technical and structural problems that impede LGBTIQ + people to be a VC or operate a social business."

"In the second week, I began to understand problems of access to financial and technical services because of laws or business rules. We created alternative strategies to promote access to financial services by LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs."

"This week I observed that my teacher was a good facilitator who encouraged us to see different business models for the LGBTIQ + market. He also assisted in our group activities and interpersonal interactions."

The problem-based learning approach is interactive and multifaceted. Active learning techniques are the foundation of PBL for social business education. We summarize questions on how they connect the previous management knowledge with social business issue. Most participants identify steps that when the coach provided them with the problem scenario, and asked them to analyze it, identified the underlying issues, and proposed potential solutions. The PBL process helps interaction among students, coach, and some customers. It seems clear that the PBL approach fostered active participation among social entrepreneurs, students and teachers in curriculum activities in contrast to the traditional business curriculum. It also encourages students to conduct research on their chosen problem or challenge, using a variety of sources such as academic articles, news stories, and interviews with experts or stakeholders.

In sum, PBL can be an efficient method for instructing students who may not be familiar with a particular social issue, nature of the social business, or process and operation of social business. PBL can give them the opportunity to tackle real-world issues and create viable, long-term solutions that benefit society, with stakeholders of the business. The nature of PBL can help students to acquire the information and abilities necessary to succeed as social entrepreneurs, by engaging in active learning that focuses on solving real-world problems. More importantly, adopting PBL in social business education allows business students to gain a comprehensive knowledge and context of community, with increased sensitivity toward LGBTIQ + issues in business.

6.3. Theme 3: research-based approach

To operate social business successfully, it is important for the business to be led and managed by leaders and team members who possess research skills. This approach is helpful for the design of student-centric learning experiences and the shift from lecture-based education to a knowledge engagement approach.

Research-based learning is becoming increasingly important in business education. In this course, we integrated a theoretical knowledge base on LGBTIQ + entrepreneurship, gender, and social entrepreneurship. The students were asked to synergize key theories and collect essential data while developing a social business plan. They spent two classes on data collection and analysis at the midpoint of the course. Apart from data management, they were required to conduct a literature review and define secondary data sources for LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs. Most of them are familiar with the research methodology and addressed in the reflections.

"I literally collected the data for the first time in this course."

"I have gained skills in qualitative data analysis for social business from the course."

Similar to PBL, the research-based approach was also useful for students who were unfamiliar with the LGBTIQ + experience in business and entrepreneurial processes. Three of the students mentioned 'new languages' and 'new knowledge on gender' when they defined the benefits of the research phase of this course. Additionally, in the case of a research-based approach to social business education, students are involved in an iterative process that mimics this cycle. They experience concrete social problems, reflect upon these issues, form abstract concepts and solutions through research, and then actively experiment with these solutions in a business context. This process promotes analytical thinking and rational decision-making skills, reinforcing the practical applicability of their learning.

To develop a social business plan and to provide solutions for the social entrepreneurs, the students were divided into three teams. Inquiry and research activities such as observation and community fieldwork are required to develop a sustainable business model that can support the LGBTIQ + community. The students reflected on their group assignments.

“Our project for this course was an activity-based business model called Rainbow-Run. We collected data from members of the LGBTIQ + community who were interested in sports activities and also interviewed potential main sponsors for the event.” (Team1)

“We used secondary data on the demands for health services among gay men and women as well as transwomen. The main lesson learned was the lack of demographic data for LGBTIQ + people in Thailand. We viewed this as a future opportunity.” (Team 2)

“We developed a business model in the style of a platform to launch an LGBTIQ + social business that promoted new skill development and employment for LGBTIQ + workers in technology, health, and business development. All the ideas emanated from the qualitative phase of the project. We interviewed recruitment agencies and found this research lacuna.” (Team3)

Technical research skills, in particular data management and financial access for LGBTIQ+, project design and analysis were frequently mentioned in the students’ reflections. The research process helped the students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers impacting learning among LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs in Thailand. More importantly, students addressed in the reflections that research skills can promote new ideas for social innovation, new goods and services to tackle LGBTIQ + issues such as inequality, access to resources, and new opportunities.

“We focused on searching the literature for business and gender issues in Thailand. When we understood the history of the LGBTIQ + movement in Thailand from the literature review, we analyzed ‘words’ representing business opportunities and impediments for LGBTIQ + people. This process improved my general skills of problem-solving, information search and evaluation and analytical thinking.”

The students also examined research-related skills for LGBTIQ + social entrepreneurs, research communication skills, collaborating with others and working effectively as part of a team. Research communication skills are critical because social entrepreneurs need to simplify their business ideas, social missions, and financial plan, then pursue the plan to financial institutions or angel investors. Incorporating facts or data as part of professional communication can be improved by adopting a research-based approach in social business education. Research communication skills in this context includes verbal communication, story-telling to the media, report writing and project pitching.

6.4. Theme 4: practical-operational teaching-learning approach

The weekly reflections confirmed active learning as the preferred learning approach among students in the social business program. The students preferred a learning experience that focused on practical engagement and how to support LGBTIQ + entrepreneur business start-ups. Developing social business plans and role play are all examples of practical-operational teaching methods that promote the connection between social and business skills.

“This week, I learned from the social entrepreneur how to design a business plan for a social business that promoted careers and employment for transwomen and transmen by understanding the needs, distinctions and similarities among trans people. I cannot learn this from textbooks.”

“To understand the practical financing aspects for LGBTIQ + startups, my teacher suggested that I go to the SME bank and ask for details on SME loans for LGBTIQ + social businesses. I now understand the limitations for LGBTIQ + social entrepreneurs that request financial help from the bank.”

By adopting the practical-operational approach, students participated in challenging, interactive and meaningful educational activities, gaining experiences that can help them develop soft and technical skills for the management of social businesses. One important learning activity was organizing students to discuss LGBTIQ + entrepreneurship on Facebook Live. They expressed that using technology on social media can promote both business and social issues to the public. Additionally, the structure of the Thai market seems to support activities by and for LGBTIQ + people.

This practical approach helped students understand the basic issues of social business, including the entrepreneurial process and LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs in the marketplace. The students also examined the operation of social business organizations. The analysis and presentation on Facebook Live motivated the students to speak out on human rights and business issues that impacted LGBTIQ + workers and gender discrimination.

“Our team worked hard to get Live Chat on LGBTIQ + since this is all new to us. We didn’t know much about the LGBTIQ + community before we started this course. This active learning truly works for me.”

“It was clear that social entrepreneurs or managers from the development world have a low level of business education and skills. There is an obvious lack of exposure and use of business models when developing their business plans.”

“This week, I learned how to explain the importance of resources for social business using a resource-based view. This was useful for me.”

The suggestions for future improvements included several ideas from the adaptation of online learning activities to work integrated learning (WIL) activities. Most students identified technology, e-learning and virtual reality as the top three active learning approaches for future social entrepreneurs.

“In my opinion, for better and relevant learning experiences, an online effective delivery mechanism, adequate support provided by the faculty and teaching assistants will be helpful.” (Social entrepreneur 1, Coach)

“I saw the use of VR to attract donors or customers. It is active and fun. Technology aspects are missing from social business in our country.” (Social entrepreneur 2, Coach)

Two concerns from the teaching and learning perspective were noted by the students. The first was staff readiness for active learning and teaching. The backgrounds of academics and teachers in the program are eclectic. Some academics may need to prepare to design appropriate learning and teaching activities for social business. The second concern is related to the importance of allowing students to discuss the social issues of LGBTIQ + people in the business context from the early stage. This issue is not novel in Thailand. The students reflected that when the teacher failed to explain key social issues for LGBTIQ + people and kept discussing issues such as human rights rather than novel issues that are related to gender and entrepreneurship, this discouraged them from pursuing social business ideas for LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this study was to identify approaches in learning and teaching social business to a group of undergraduate students in the Thai context. It is important for HEIs to understand that education for social enterprise is a topic that is receiving more attention from several global actors in higher education. Various trends and pedagogical techniques for social entrepreneur training have evolved, posing new challenges to the Thai and international academic communities [9].

According to Gregory Dees, "the Father of Social Entrepreneurship" [41], the skills necessary for this unique sector (social business) are dispersed among different disciplines, making the "social" part of the discipline as vital as the "entrepreneurship" aspect. This study confirms the importance of educational approaches to promote key skills for the future social entrepreneurs. Learning approaches raised by students in this study are student-centered.

It can be explained, using learning theories, into four steps for learning and teaching social business education for LGBTIQ + issues. We adopted a blend of multiple learning theories, namely constructivist learning theory, situated learning theory, and transformative learning theory, to explain the concept of social business learning in this study. Fig. 1 illustrates key learning steps in social business education for LGBTIQ + issues.

- **Understanding the Root of Social Issues** (Constructivist Learning Theory): This step embodies the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory where learners construct their own understanding of a topic by experiencing situations and reflecting on those experiences. In this context, students actively engage in understanding the complexity of social issues pertaining to LGBTIQ + communities. They will delve into the root of the problems, explore different perspectives, and form their own interpretations of these societal challenges.
- **Identifying Allies and Partners** (Situated Learning Theory): As per the Situated Learning Theory, learning is a process of social participation. In this stage, students will identify and collaborate with allies or partners from both the business and social sectors. Learning here is inextricably tied to the social and cultural context in which it occurs, fostering a deeper understanding of the intricacies involved in managing social businesses for LGBTIQ + issues.

Creating Ongoing Dialogues with Key LGBTIQ + Organizations (Situated Learning Theory): Employing the Situated Learning Theory, students will engage in consistent dialogues with key LGBTIQ + organizations. This fosters a community of practice, allowing students to learn from the expertise and experiences of these organizations, gaining a richer understanding of the real-world applications and implications of their theoretical knowledge.

As Thai culture highly values direct experience and learning through engagement, educators can organize interactions between students and LGBTIQ + organizations. Providing opportunities for students to engage with these organizations can give them first-hand experience of the challenges and opportunities that exist within the realm of social business for LGBTIQ + communities. It also helps in developing a community of practice where students can learn from experts in a contextualized setting.

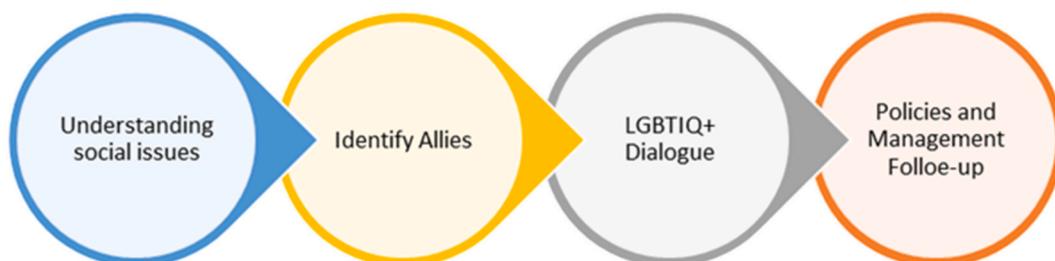


Fig. 1. Stages in advocacy approach in social business education.

- **Engaging in Public Policies** (Transformative Learning Theory): As per the Transformative Learning Theory, learners alter their perspectives and assumptions about the world, leading to a change in behavior. In this final step, students will engage with public policies that impact LGBTIQ + social businesses. This active involvement challenges pre-existing beliefs and attitudes, promoting a transformative learning experience. They will understand how policy decisions affect social businesses and become better equipped to advocate for policy changes that can strengthen business and social issues related to the LGBTIQ + community.

The Thai educational system has recently begun to stress the importance of critical thinking and societal engagement. Teachers can use this shift to stimulate students' thinking around public policies affecting LGBTIQ + social businesses. Students can be encouraged to reflect upon and challenge existing policies, and envision new policy frameworks that could support and enhance the business and social environments for the LGBTIQ + community.

An interaction with social entrepreneurs may considerably improve the learning experience of students in a social business program by providing them with a real-world perspective and practical skills required in the social business field. This is because engagement with social entrepreneurs can provide students with the real-world perspective and practical abilities needed in the industry.

Indeed, social entrepreneurs who coached students in this study can help students develop essential entrepreneurial skills such as problem-solving, creative thinking, leadership, and decision-making. These skills are critical for running successful social enterprises. Also, this paper is similar to findings from Elliot [32] that engaging with social entrepreneurs can help students identify and explore new market trends, social needs, and innovative solutions for LGBTIQ + community.

The reflections from the students defined social entrepreneurs as catalysts and protagonists for social transformation, transformational leaders and even social change makers. By adopting various learning and teaching approaches, students enrolled in the program explained that the importance and nature of social problems related to gender discrimination, self-inspiration, previous personal experiences and social networks can promote effectiveness in practicing skills for social entrepreneurs.

This study further bolsters the primary assertion made by Sherman [12] that we indeed have the capability to learn and cultivate social business competencies, provided the educational framework is meticulously designed for this purpose. Our findings indicate that the quality of social business education is significantly influenced by key methodologies encompassing advocacy, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), research-oriented instruction, and practical engagement.

Adopting advocacy and problem-based approaches helped the students to understand the root causes of LGBTIQ + problems and empathize and develop moral judgment to engage in social business activities. The advocacy approach helped the students to explore opportunities from the perspectives of LGBTIQ + people who may suffer discrimination when creating a new venture or indirect discrimination via the entrepreneurship education and training system.

The research-based approach fostered student strength in analytical thinking and rationale in business decision-making. In the former approaches, students and teachers can become emotional when identifying social problems. This approach, on the other hand, improved business skills, cognitive learning and the decision-making process. In fact, this approach can be explained by experiential learning theory. The research-based approach fostered student strength in analytical thinking and rationale in business decision-making. In the other learning approaches, we found in this study, students and teachers can become emotional when identifying social problems. This approach, on the other hand, improved rationale of business skills, cognitive learning and the decision-making process.

The final approach as practical-operational teaching-learning helped the students to transfer their business and technical skills from the previous courses, using the correct management tools and market analysis as a practical approach. It appears that the practical-operational teaching-learning approach is highly effective in the social business program, in particular LGBTIQ + business. The students appreciate the hands-on, active learning experiences which allow them to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations, specifically in supporting LGBTIQ + entrepreneurial business start-ups.

This study confirms that the impact of active learning for social entrepreneurship education can be high when students can actively study social business issues. The reflections highlight the impact of active learning on students' understanding of social business concepts. Continuing to develop and incorporate more of these experiences, perhaps even extending to other marginalized groups, can help further students' learning. This can be done through case studies, role-plays, and direct engagement with social entrepreneurs.

We also identify issues in leveraging technology for social business learning: Many students identified technology, e-learning, and virtual reality as future active learning approaches. Virtual reality (VR) could be used to simulate real-life social business scenarios, while online delivery mechanisms could allow for a broader reach of the program. The amalgamation of technology in problem-based learning can potentially help students understand the real-life situation of social entrepreneurship.

When working on social business education with students, we need to continue discussion and education on social issues so that we can mitigate the risk of social enterprises losing sight of their social goals. By placing emphasis on discussing social issues, students will be encouraged to focus on the amalgamation of business and social contributions of their actions. It may also be beneficial to include modules or discussions on other social issues affecting various marginalized communities.

In conclusion, social business education should be strategically designed for those who show the desire to improve social conditions and produce something of social significant value. Different approaches to learning and teaching promote the self-motivation of students. A variety of learning and teaching approaches, relevant to the conditions of social business and social issues, can build the capacity of the LGBTIQ + community, elevate the socioeconomic status of LGBTIQ + entrepreneurs and accelerate equal opportunities for members of the LGBTIQ + community in Thailand.

8. Limitations

Since the focus of this research is on the students' viewpoints in the social business course, we relied on secondary data analysis to determine the most effective methods of instruction. Future studies should include primary data collected through in-class interviews and observations.

More importantly, external factors such as technology, resources, and capabilities of higher education institutions that influence the quality of social business education program should be further examined in future research. Future research should expand views on gender barriers in the training and education programs for social entrepreneurs by examining views from various stakeholders.

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Ethics declaration

- This study was reviewed and approved by IPSR-IRB Mahidol University, with the approval number 2019/06–202.
- All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study.

Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request. No additional information is available for this paper.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Nattavud Pimpa: Conceptualization, Data curation, Resources, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author used Chat GPT in order to refine literature and design the structure of the paper. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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