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Designing a Social Entrepreneurship Model for Iran's Education System

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: The present study aimed to design a social entrepreneurship model for Iran's education system.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a qualitative approach using systematic grounded theory. The participants consisted of 24 teachers, school principals, educational experts, and faculty members who were selected through purposeful and subsequently theoretical sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. To ensure data trustworthiness, qualitative research quality criteria were met, and coding reliability was verified.

Findings: The findings revealed that the social entrepreneurship model in Iran's education system is centered around the core phenomenon of "institutionalizing social entrepreneurship in schools." This phenomenon is influenced by causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and consequential conditions. The most prominent extracted categories included bricolage and creative resource mobilization, the attitude and self-efficacy of educational actors, the social entrepreneurship curriculum, experiential and service-learning, the school as an ecosystem of social action, localization of the model aligned with Iranian contextual requirements, and criteria for identifying and evaluating social entrepreneurship.

Conclusion: The results demonstrated that implementing this model can lead to sustainable social value creation, enhancement of educational justice, and the transformation of schools from purely educational institutions into platforms for resolving social issues. Overall, the proposed model provides a localized and systematic framework for policy-making, curriculum planning, and the empowerment of educational actors to develop social entrepreneurship within the Iranian education system.

Keywords: *Educational Justice, Grounded Theory, Institutionalization of Social Entrepreneurship, Iran's Education System, Social Entrepreneurship*

1. Introduction

Rapid social, economic, technological, and environmental transformations have substantially changed the expectations placed on contemporary education systems. Educational institutions are no longer evaluated solely according to their capacity to transmit disciplinary knowledge or prepare learners for conventional employment; they are increasingly expected to cultivate socially responsible citizens who can recognize complex collective problems, mobilize available capacities, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and develop innovative and sustainable responses to community needs. Problems such as educational inequality, poverty, social exclusion, environmental degradation, unemployment, unequal access to public services, demographic change, and the weakening of social cohesion cannot be addressed exclusively through centralized governmental interventions or traditional market mechanisms. They require citizens and institutions capable of combining social commitment with entrepreneurial initiative. In this context, social entrepreneurship has emerged as an important framework for connecting innovation, civic responsibility, social justice, and sustainable value creation. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which is generally organized around economic opportunity and private value capture, social entrepreneurship places the identification and resolution of social problems at the center of entrepreneurial activity and assesses success primarily through the creation of enduring social value (Dees, 2001).

Although no single definition fully encompasses the diversity of social entrepreneurial practices, the literature generally portrays social entrepreneurship as a dynamic process through which individuals, groups, and organizations identify unmet social needs, develop innovative solutions, mobilize resources under conditions of constraint, and establish mechanisms for sustaining social impact. This perspective emphasizes that social entrepreneurship is neither synonymous with charitable assistance nor limited to the establishment of nonprofit organizations. Charity may relieve an immediate need, whereas social entrepreneurship seeks to alter the conditions that reproduce the problem by creating scalable, adaptive, and sustainable solutions. Social entrepreneurship may therefore emerge within nonprofit organizations, private enterprises, public institutions, community networks, or hybrid organizational arrangements, provided that social value remains the dominant mission. Mair and Martí conceptualized it as a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities that catalyze social change or address social needs (Mair & Martí, 2006). Similarly, the multidimensional model proposed by Weerawardena and Mort highlights the interaction of innovativeness, proactiveness, risk management, environmental dynamics, and commitment to a social mission, demonstrating that social entrepreneurship requires both moral purpose and strategic organizational capability (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006).

Education occupies a particularly important position in the development of social entrepreneurship because entrepreneurial orientations, social values, self-efficacy beliefs, problem-solving capacities, and civic identities are not formed spontaneously. They are shaped through learning experiences, institutional cultures, role models, opportunities for participation, and interaction with real social challenges. Schools and universities can either reproduce passive, examination-oriented, and individualistic forms of learning or provide environments in which learners perceive themselves as capable of influencing their communities. Social entrepreneurship education seeks to establish the latter orientation by integrating social awareness with initiative, creativity, ethical judgment, collaboration, and action. It encourages learners to move from identifying a social problem to understanding its causes, recognizing affected stakeholders, evaluating available resources, designing a response, implementing a solution, and assessing its social consequences (Michel & Förster, 2025; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2025). Therefore, social entrepreneurship education should not be reduced to teaching business-plan preparation or presenting isolated examples of successful social enterprises. It represents a broader educational process through which learners acquire the competencies and dispositions required to act as responsible agents of social change.

One of the central theoretical issues in this field concerns the formation of social entrepreneurial intention. Intention reflects an individual's conscious readiness to engage in future social entrepreneurial behavior and is influenced by personal, cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors. The conceptual model developed by Tran and von Korflesch demonstrates that social entrepreneurial intention is shaped through the interaction of perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, prior experience, social norms, personal values, and educational influences (Tran & von Korflesch, 2016). Accordingly, learners may recognize the importance of a social issue without developing an intention to intervene if

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they lack confidence, practical competence, institutional support, or opportunities for meaningful participation. Evidence from social work education similarly indicates that entrepreneurship education can strengthen entrepreneurial intention, although its effects depend on how students interpret social problems, professional roles, feasibility, and institutional encouragement (García-Uceda et al., 2022). Recent research also confirms that entrepreneurship education can positively influence social entrepreneurial intentions by strengthening entrepreneurial attitudes, perceived capability, and willingness to create social impact (Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2025). These findings demonstrate that educational systems influence not only what learners know about social entrepreneurship but also whether they regard socially entrepreneurial action as desirable, legitimate, and achievable.

Competence and self-efficacy constitute particularly important mechanisms through which education may affect social entrepreneurial behavior. Social entrepreneurship competence encompasses the integrated knowledge, skills, attitudes, and ethical capacities needed to identify social opportunities, understand community needs, collaborate with stakeholders, use resources creatively, design innovative interventions, manage uncertainty, and evaluate social outcomes. Education that merely introduces entrepreneurial terminology is unlikely to produce these capabilities. Learners must experience situations in which they make decisions, negotiate competing interests, test ideas, receive feedback, and observe the consequences of their actions. Mao and Yao found that the effect of social entrepreneurship education on social entrepreneurial intention is mediated by the development of competence, suggesting that students become more willing to initiate socially oriented ventures when education strengthens their perceived and actual ability to act (Mao & Yao, 2025). Audah likewise emphasized the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and students' social entrepreneurship competence (Audah, 2025). Thus, a viable educational model must address not only curriculum content but also learners' beliefs that they possess the capacity to understand social problems and contribute effectively to their resolution.

The pedagogical architecture of social entrepreneurship education is consequently a decisive consideration. Traditional teacher-centered instruction, memorization, and abstract lectures may communicate definitions but rarely develop the judgment, resilience, creativity, and collective agency required for social innovation. Active learning approaches are more compatible with the experiential nature of social entrepreneurship because they position learners as investigators, designers, decision-makers, and collaborators. Capella-Peris and colleagues showed that active learning can promote social entrepreneurship in urban education by engaging learners directly with community issues and requiring them to develop practically relevant responses (Capella-Peris et al., 2023). Such approaches connect curricular knowledge with the lived realities of communities and help students recognize that social problems are neither distant nor immutable. They also enable learners to develop empathy, communication, teamwork, initiative, and reflective judgment—competencies that cannot be acquired adequately through passive reception of information.

Service-learning provides another influential pedagogical framework because it integrates academic learning with organized service addressing genuine community needs. In social entrepreneurship education, service-learning differs from occasional volunteering because community engagement is combined with structured inquiry, reciprocal partnerships, reflection, and the deliberate creation of social value. The international collaborative project examined by Ballesteros-Sola and Magomedova illustrates how service-learning and collaborative online international learning can expose students to diverse social contexts while strengthening intercultural communication, teamwork, and social entrepreneurial problem-solving (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). Extracurricular value-creation activities can similarly provide a flexible setting in which learners engage with stakeholders, create benefits for others, and learn through the practical consequences of their initiatives. Mukesh and colleagues describe this orientation as "value for value," emphasizing that social entrepreneurship education becomes more meaningful when students generate observable value for communities rather than merely complete simulated academic exercises (Mukesh et al., 2024). Such evidence suggests that socially entrepreneurial learning should be organized around real beneficiaries, authentic problems, iterative experimentation, and reflective evaluation.

Challenge-based learning extends this experiential orientation by organizing education around open-ended and socially relevant challenges rather than predetermined exercises with singular correct answers. Students are required to investigate the structural dimensions of a problem, collect evidence, collaborate across disciplines, develop prototypes, evaluate feasibility, and revise their ideas. DePryck and Wambacq argue that challenge-based

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learning provides an effective basis for social entrepreneurship education because it integrates theoretical knowledge, social engagement, creativity, and practical implementation (DePryck & Wambacq, 2025). Research in vocational education likewise indicates that challenge-based learning can connect occupational competencies with social innovation and enable students to understand how technical and professional knowledge may be used to address societal problems (Michel & Förster, 2025). This is especially significant for educational systems seeking to overcome the separation between academic learning and social life. When learners encounter authentic uncertainty and resource limitations, they develop adaptive problem-solving capacities more closely aligned with the conditions under which social entrepreneurs operate.

The applicability of social entrepreneurship education across disciplines further demonstrates that it should not be restricted to business and management programs. Social problems are multidimensional and frequently require collaboration among education, medicine, engineering, social work, technology, public administration, and the humanities. The SinnoLAB model proposed within medical education shows how innovation laboratories can enable students and professionals to identify community health needs, develop locally relevant solutions, and integrate social entrepreneurship into clinical and public-health training (Raut & Joshi, 2023). This interdisciplinary potential is particularly relevant to school systems, where social entrepreneurship may provide a unifying framework connecting science, citizenship, environmental education, technology, arts, vocational preparation, and community service. Rather than functioning as an additional isolated subject, it can become a cross-curricular orientation through which students apply knowledge from multiple domains to socially meaningful purposes.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship education depends on the entrepreneurial capacity of the institutions and providers responsible for delivering it. Educational organizations may promote innovation rhetorically while maintaining rigid administrative structures, risk-averse cultures, fragmented curricula, and assessment systems that reward conformity. Kwong and colleagues raise this issue by examining how entrepreneurial social entrepreneurship education providers themselves are, highlighting the discrepancy that may arise when institutions teach entrepreneurial initiative without practicing adaptability, experimentation, networking, or stakeholder responsiveness (Kwong et al., 2022). Accordingly, institutionalizing social entrepreneurship requires changes extending beyond individual courses. It demands supportive leadership, curricular flexibility, teacher empowerment, partnership infrastructures, access to mentoring, recognition of community-based projects, and mechanisms for sustaining successful initiatives. Without these institutional arrangements, social entrepreneurship education may remain dependent on enthusiastic individuals and disappear when personnel, leadership, or funding conditions change.

Knowledge management is equally important because social entrepreneurship requires both the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of existing knowledge and capacities. Ndou and Passiante describe this requirement through the concept of knowledge ambidexterity, which involves balancing the creation of novel knowledge with the effective use, transfer, and recombination of available knowledge (Ndou & Passiante, 2023). In educational settings, exploratory learning enables students and teachers to question assumptions, identify emerging needs, and experiment with unfamiliar solutions, whereas exploitative learning helps them draw on established expertise, local experience, institutional memory, and proven practices. A social entrepreneurship model should therefore facilitate interaction among schools, families, universities, civil-society organizations, local enterprises, public agencies, and community leaders. These networks expand access to knowledge and resources while preventing educational institutions from attempting to solve complex social problems in isolation.

The Iranian context provides substantial justification for developing such a systemic model. Iran possesses important cultural traditions of mutual assistance, philanthropy, collective responsibility, community solidarity, and concern for social justice. However, these capacities have not yet been systematically translated into an integrated social entrepreneurship framework across the formal education system. Existing Iranian research has concentrated predominantly on higher education, where scholars have identified structural, managerial, cultural, curricular, and policy factors influencing social entrepreneurship. Davoudi Rad and colleagues developed and validated a model of social entrepreneurship for Iran's higher education system, demonstrating that its development requires coordination among individual competencies, organizational capacities, environmental conditions, and institutional policies (Davoudi Rad et al., 2021). Mostafazadeh and Haghighat Monfared similarly proposed a higher-education model that emphasized the interaction of organizational, educational,

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environmental, and stakeholder-related factors (Mostafazadeh & Haghighat Monfared, 2021). These studies have established an important national foundation, but their concentration on universities limits their direct applicability to the broader education system and particularly to schools.

Curriculum studies in Iran have further demonstrated that social entrepreneurship cannot be developed without purposeful decisions regarding educational objectives, content, teaching strategies, learning experiences, and assessment. Hosseini and colleagues designed and validated a higher education curriculum model for social entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of aligning curricular components with social needs, entrepreneurial competencies, and experiential forms of learning (Hosseini et al., 2022). More recently, Etesami and colleagues proposed a social entrepreneurship curriculum model based on a rhizomatic approach for Iran's primary education system (Etesami et al., 2026). A rhizomatic perspective is particularly relevant because it views learning as nonlinear, networked, adaptive, and open to multiple points of connection rather than as a fixed sequence of predetermined knowledge. This approach corresponds with the nature of social problems, which rarely conform to disciplinary boundaries or standardized solutions. However, curriculum design alone cannot ensure implementation unless it is embedded within a broader model encompassing teachers, school leadership, evaluation, community partnerships, cultural legitimacy, resource mobilization, and supportive policy structures.

The need for integration is reinforced by the meta-synthesis conducted by Fazelipour and colleagues, which indicates that social entrepreneurship development models commonly involve interconnected individual, organizational, environmental, cultural, institutional, and strategic dimensions (Fazelipour et al., 2023). This multidimensionality means that transferring a model from another country or educational level without contextual adaptation may produce superficial or unsustainable outcomes. Iran's education system is characterized by centralized policymaking, considerable regional and socioeconomic diversity, established curricular regulations, distinctive cultural values, and varying levels of institutional and material capacity. A suitable model must therefore be localized without becoming isolated from international knowledge. Localization requires identifying how universal components—such as innovation, social value, self-efficacy, experiential learning, resourcefulness, collaboration, and impact evaluation—can be interpreted and operationalized within Iranian educational structures and sociocultural expectations.

A further challenge concerns the distinction between temporary social activities and institutionalized social entrepreneurship. Schools may organize charitable campaigns, environmental events, or community-service programs, but such activities do not automatically constitute social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship requires systematic problem identification, stakeholder participation, innovation, sustainable resource use, continuity, and evidence of social impact. It also requires that successful practices become integrated into organizational routines and educational culture rather than remaining isolated events. A comprehensive model must therefore clarify the criteria through which socially entrepreneurial initiatives can be identified, supported, evaluated, and sustained. It should explain how learners and educational actors progress from awareness to intention, from intention to competence, from competence to action, and from isolated action to institutionalized social value creation.

Despite the expansion of national and international scholarship, a significant gap remains concerning a comprehensive, empirically grounded, and context-sensitive model for social entrepreneurship throughout Iran's education system. Existing studies provide valuable insights into entrepreneurial intention, competence, self-efficacy, experiential pedagogy, higher education, curriculum design, and institutional development, but these elements have often been examined separately. What remains insufficiently explained is how causal drivers, cultural and institutional contexts, facilitating or constraining conditions, educational strategies, stakeholder interactions, evaluative criteria, and intended outcomes are connected within a coherent process. Because these relationships are complex, context-dependent, and partly embedded in the experiences of teachers, principals, educational experts, and scholars, qualitative model development is particularly appropriate. Methodological evidence indicates that conceptually rich qualitative inquiry can achieve saturation through purposive and theoretically guided engagement with a diverse but focused group of knowledgeable participants (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Such an approach can reveal dimensions that predetermined quantitative instruments may overlook and can provide a substantive basis for subsequent validation and implementation.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to design a comprehensive and context-sensitive social entrepreneurship model for Iran's education system.

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2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was conducted with an applied objective and employed a qualitative design based on the systematic grounded theory approach. This methodology was selected because it allows the researcher to develop a conceptual model directly from the field data and participants' experiences rather than imposing pre-determined theoretical assumptions on the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Charmaz, 2021). In this approach, data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously and iteratively so that categories, subcategories, and their relationships could gradually emerge from the data through a process of comparison, refinement, and abstraction. From a methodological perspective, the study was descriptive and non-experimental, and its empirical focus was on understanding the underlying processes, conditions, interactions, and consequences related to social entrepreneurship in Iran's education system.

The participants of the study consisted of four key groups: teachers, school principals, educational experts, and university researchers/faculty members. These groups were purposefully selected because each represented a distinct but complementary perspective on the educational, managerial, policy, and research dimensions of social entrepreneurship in education. Teachers were included due to their direct involvement in classroom practice and daily educational challenges; school principals because of their managerial and decision-making responsibilities; educational experts because of their experience in planning, policy, and supervisory processes; and university researchers/faculty members because of their theoretical and analytical expertise in education and social innovation. Non-probability sampling was used in the study. At the initial stage, purposive sampling was applied to identify individuals with sufficient professional experience, specialized knowledge, and direct familiarity with the topic. As analysis progressed, theoretical sampling was employed so that the selection of subsequent participants would be guided by emerging conceptual needs and analytical gaps identified in the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that the interviews no longer produced new concepts or dimensions relevant to the emerging categories. In this study, saturation was reached at the 24th interview, and therefore a total of 24 interviews were conducted. This number is consistent with methodological recommendations for qualitative saturation when interviews are sufficiently rich and conceptually dense.

In total, 24 participants took part in the study, including 6 teachers, 6 school principals, 6 educational experts, and 6 university researchers/faculty members. All participants held at least a master's degree, while a substantial number had doctoral qualifications. Their professional experience ranged from approximately 10 to 22 years. This diversity in academic background, occupational role, and professional experience contributed to the richness of the data and supported comparative analysis across participant groups. Inclusion criteria were: direct experience and knowledge related to the educational, managerial, social, and innovative dimensions of social entrepreneurship in education; membership in one of the four target groups; relevant professional experience; possession of at least a master's degree; ability to provide reflective and analytically useful insights; willingness to participate; and sufficient time for the interview process. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness to continue participation, withdrawal from the study at any stage, and responses that lacked conceptual depth, thematic relevance, or analytical value. Ethical considerations were fully observed throughout the research. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences was explicitly respected.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Data collection in the present study was performed through semi-structured interviews, which served as the primary research instrument. This tool was selected because of its flexibility and its capacity to support in-depth exploration of complex and multidimensional social phenomena while still maintaining a coherent interview structure (Patton, 2015; Charmaz, 2021). The interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and the conceptual scope of social entrepreneurship in education. It included open-ended questions concerning participants' perceptions of the concept, institutional barriers, enabling conditions, school-level practices, policy requirements, stakeholder roles, and the possibilities for embedding social entrepreneurship within the Iranian education system. The semi-structured format made it possible to explore participants' experiences in a guided but open manner,

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allowing the researcher to follow emerging ideas, probe for clarification, and deepen the discussion where necessary.

During the interviews, follow-up questions and probing techniques were used to clarify meanings, explore ambiguities, and enrich the conceptual depth of the data. This approach is particularly compatible with grounded theory because it enables the interview protocol to evolve in response to the analytic process and the categories emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2025). All interviews were conducted with participants' permission, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. In addition to the interview transcripts, field notes and analytical memos were prepared throughout the data collection process to document contextual observations, initial interpretations, emerging ideas, and conceptual reflections. These materials played an important role in supporting the coding process and preserving the analytical traceability of the study. The systematic use of interview recordings, verbatim transcription, field notes, and memos strengthened the depth and integrity of the qualitative data and provided a robust basis for grounded theory analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with the systematic grounded theory procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin, using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Analysis began immediately after the first interviews and continued simultaneously with data collection, following the logic of constant comparative analysis. In the first stage, the transcripts were read carefully line by line and meaningful units of text were identified and labeled through open coding. During this stage, initial concepts were extracted from the data without imposing pre-existing categories. In the second stage, related codes were clustered into subcategories and their conditions, interactions, and consequences were examined through axial coding. In the final stage, selective coding was used to integrate the categories around a core category and to construct the final conceptual model of social entrepreneurship in Iran's education system. Constant comparison was employed throughout the process to identify similarities, differences, conceptual overlaps, and recurring patterns across interviews and participant groups.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were considered in line with the standards proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Tracy (2020). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, simultaneous data collection and analysis, repeated review of transcripts, and the use of probing questions during interviews. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through careful documentation of the analytical process, systematic memo writing, and transparent recording of coding decisions. Transferability was supported by providing a rich and detailed description of the participants, the sampling process, and the research context so that readers could judge the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

In addition, intercoder reliability was assessed to strengthen the consistency of the coding process. A portion of the interview data was independently coded by the researcher and a second coder familiar with qualitative research and grounded theory procedures. Agreement between the two coders was evaluated using Cohen's kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960). Out of 756 coding decisions, 684 were in agreement and 72 were in disagreement, resulting in a kappa value of 0.876, with a standard error of 0.029 and a T value of 24.267. This result indicates a very high level of agreement and confirms the acceptable reliability of the coding framework. Overall, the analytical process was carried out with methodological rigor, transparency, and sensitivity to the iterative nature of grounded theory, leading to the extraction of categories and relationships that formed the basis of the final model.

3. Findings and Results

The findings of this qualitative study were derived on the basis of grounded theory and with reference to the Strauss and Corbin (2008) approach. The purpose of this analysis was to identify and explain the components, dimensions, categories, and conceptual relationships relevant to designing a social entrepreneurship model in Iran's education system. The analysis was carried out in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, and ultimately the conceptual model of the study was formulated around the core category of "institutionalizing social entrepreneurship in schools." The data collected through semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable participants indicated that social entrepreneurship in Iran's education system is a multidimensional and context-bound phenomenon whose realization requires the simultaneous interplay of a set of individual, organizational, cultural, institutional, and educational factors. Based on this analysis, 756 initial

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concepts were extracted and, after refinement, integration, and constant comparison, organized into 30 major categories and then 10 core categories.

In the first stage of analysis, the interview transcripts were examined line by line and the initial concepts related to social entrepreneurship in schools were extracted. This stage led to the identification of a wide range of concepts concerning the attitudes, capabilities, requirements, opportunities, barriers, mechanisms, and outcomes of social entrepreneurship. These concepts were extracted directly from the data without relying on predefined frameworks and formed the basis for developing the study's conceptual categories. In the second stage, similar and closely related concepts were organized into 30 major categories, which made it possible to explain the phenomenon in a more structured manner. Subsequently, in order to develop a coherent theoretical structure for explaining the social entrepreneurship model, these categories were reduced to 10 core categories during axial coding.

Table 1 presents the core categories extracted in the axial coding stage, together with their corresponding major categories, in order to systematically display the conceptual structure of social entrepreneurship in schools.

Table 1

Core Categories Extracted in the Axial Coding Stage

No.	Core Categories	Major Categories
1	Sustainable social value creation	Identifying a social-educational problem, transforming the problem into an opportunity for value creation, generating lasting social impact beyond individual gain
2	The social identity and mission of education	Clarifying the social mission of the school, aligning with educational equity and the common good, consolidating a social-educational identity
3	Bricolage and creative resource mobilization	Creative use of available resources, combining dispersed capacities, resilience in financial and structural constraints
4	Attitudes, intentions, and self-efficacy of educational actors	Strengthening belief in the ability to solve social problems, increasing intention and readiness for entrepreneurial action, social responsibility
5	Social entrepreneurship curriculum	Developing content based on social value and innovation, active methods, integration into formal and extracurricular programs
6	Experiential and service-oriented learning	Engagement with real-world issues, service-learning experiences, reflection, and documentation for sustainable learning
7	School as an ecosystem of social action	School as a hub for problem-solving, family and community participation, development of active citizenship
8	Localization of the model based on Iran's contextual requirements	Alignment with Islamic-Iranian values, use of social capital, attention to policies and administrative structures
9	Sustainability and institutionalization of social entrepreneurship	Embedding in the school's structure and culture, continuity despite changes in principals/teachers, sustainable financial and organizational mechanisms
10	Criteria for identifying and evaluating social entrepreneurship	Distinguishing it from charity, assessing social/educational outcomes, validation through indicators and field evidence

As shown in Table 1, the extracted core categories indicate that social entrepreneurship in schools is not merely an activity or a temporary program; rather, it encompasses a set of cognitive, institutional, educational, and cultural components. These categories clearly show that realizing social entrepreneurship requires a linkage among social value creation, school identity, available resources, actors' attitudes, instructional design, and evaluation mechanisms.

In the final stage, the core categories were reinterpreted within a coherent conceptual structure, and the central phenomenon of the study was identified as "institutionalizing social entrepreneurship in schools." This phenomenon emerges from the interaction of causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. To explain more precisely the position of each of these categories in the paradigmatic model of grounded theory, Table 2 was developed.

Table 2 presents the reconstructed major and core categories based on the paradigmatic model to clarify the role of each category in explaining the process of institutionalizing social entrepreneurship in schools.

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Table 2

Reconstructed Major and Core Categories Based on the Paradigmatic Model

No.	Core Category	Major Category	Type of Category in Grounded Theory	Reason for Inclusion
1	Sustainable social value creation	Ability to identify a social-educational problem and transform it into an opportunity for value creation	Consequences	Final outcome of action
2	The social identity and mission of education	Social mission of the school, educational equity, and the common good	Contextual conditions	Value-based and institutional context
3	Bricolage and creative resource mobilization	Creative use of resources and resilience in constraints	Causal conditions	Initiating factor of action
4	Attitudes, intentions, and self-efficacy of educational actors	Belief in the ability to solve problems and readiness for social action	Causal conditions	Internal cause of behavior
5	Social entrepreneurship curriculum	Designing instructional content and active methods	Strategies	Practical mechanism
6	Experiential and service-oriented learning	Engagement with real problems and transforming experience into learning	Strategies	Practical mechanism
7	School as an ecosystem of social action	Network of interaction among school, family, and community	Contextual conditions	Environmental structure
8	Localization of the model based on Iran's contextual requirements	Alignment with cultural values and local structures	Contextual conditions	Specific context of realization
9	Sustainability and institutionalization of social entrepreneurship	Embedding in the school's structure and culture	Consequences	Long-term outcome
10	Criteria for identifying and evaluating social entrepreneurship	Distinction, assessment, and validation	Intervening conditions	Moderating factor

Analysis of Table 2 shows that the core categories are classified within the five main dimensions of grounded theory; some categories function as causal conditions and serve as the initial drivers of the phenomenon, others provide the context for its realization, some play an intervening and regulating role, and others explain the operational strategies and final consequences.

In the final interpretation of these dimensions, the causal conditions include "bricolage and creative resource mobilization" and "attitudes, intentions, and self-efficacy of educational actors," which function as the initial impetus. At the contextual level, "the social identity and mission of education," "school as an ecosystem of social action," and "localization of the model based on Iran's contextual requirements" provide the necessary foundation. In the intervening conditions, "criteria for identifying and evaluating social entrepreneurship" play an important role in guiding and validating the process. At the strategy level, "the social entrepreneurship curriculum" and "experiential and service-oriented learning" indicate that social entrepreneurship can be realized when it is integrated into formal education and students' lived experiences. Finally, the consequences include "sustainable social value creation" and "sustainability and institutionalization of social entrepreneurship," both of which indicate the consolidation of this model in the school's structure and culture.

In the final interpretation, the central phenomenon of "institutionalizing social entrepreneurship in schools" is realized when the school shifts from being merely an educational unit to an ecosystem for problem-solving and social value creation. From a theoretical perspective, this model emphasizes the interconnection among the inner motivation of actors, the institutional capacity of the school, the Iranian cultural context, and experiential learning. From a practical perspective, the development of social entrepreneurship requires simultaneous policy-making in curriculum, school culture, evaluation systems, and the empowerment of actors. The final model is illustrated in Figure 1.

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Figure 1

The Social Entrepreneurship Model for Iran's Education System as "Institutionalizing Social Entrepreneurship in Schools"



Figure 1 illustrates the final model of social entrepreneurship in Iran's education system within the framework of the grounded theory paradigmatic model. At the core of this model lies the central phenomenon, "Institutionalizing Social Entrepreneurship in Schools," which serves as the hub that links all other conceptual relationships. The process of this model begins with "Causal Conditions," where "Bricolage and Creative Resource Mobilization," alongside "Attitude, Intention, and Self-Efficacy of Educational Actors," act as the primary drivers that set the stage for initiating entrepreneurial activities. Alongside these factors, "Contextual Conditions"—including "Identity and Social Mission of Education," "School as a Social Action Ecosystem," and "Model Localization Based on Iran's Requirements"—create a favorable environment aligned with indigenous values to facilitate the realization of the central phenomenon. Meanwhile, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating Social Entrepreneurship," serving as "Intervening Conditions," play a guiding and steering role, ensuring that the entrepreneurship process remains aligned with the path of genuine value creation. All these conditions interact to facilitate the adoption of "Strategies/Interactions," such as the "Social Entrepreneurship Curriculum" and "Experiential and Service-Learning," which ultimately lead to the model's final outcomes: "Creating Sustainable Social Value" and "Sustainability and Institutionalization of Social Entrepreneurship." Thus, Figure 1 illustrates a systematic process in which the school transforms from a traditional educational unit into an ecosystem for problem-solving and social value creation.

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4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study developed a grounded-theory model of social entrepreneurship for Iran's education system centered on the core phenomenon of "institutionalizing social entrepreneurship in schools." The analysis showed that social entrepreneurship in education is not an isolated instructional activity, a temporary charitable initiative, or a supplementary entrepreneurship course; rather, it is a systemic process emerging through the interaction of causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. The causal conditions consisted of bricolage and creative resource mobilization, together with the attitudes, intentions, and self-efficacy of educational actors. The contextual conditions included the social identity and mission of education, the school as an ecosystem of social action, and localization of the model in accordance with Iranian requirements. Criteria for identifying and evaluating social entrepreneurship constituted the intervening condition, while a social entrepreneurship curriculum and experiential and service-oriented learning represented the principal strategies. Finally, sustainable social value creation and the long-term institutionalization of social entrepreneurship were identified as the main consequences of the model. Collectively, these results indicate that schools can become platforms for addressing social and educational problems only when individual agency, curriculum, organizational culture, community participation, contextual compatibility, and evaluation mechanisms operate in an integrated manner.

The identification of institutionalization as the core phenomenon indicates that social entrepreneurship must become embedded in the structures, routines, values, and decision-making processes of schools rather than remaining dependent on sporadic projects or individual enthusiasm. This interpretation is compatible with the foundational conception of social entrepreneurship as a sustained process of creating social value through innovative and opportunity-oriented responses to unmet needs (Dees, 2001). It also corresponds with the process-oriented view of Mair and Martí, according to which social entrepreneurship involves the novel combination of resources to initiate social change and address persistent social problems (Mair & Martí, 2006). From this perspective, institutionalization means that the social mission becomes part of the school's identity, that resources are systematically directed toward socially valuable outcomes, and that initiatives remain operational despite changes in administrators, teachers, budgets, or policy priorities. The multidimensional model proposed by Weerawardena and Mort similarly emphasizes that social entrepreneurship results from the interaction of social mission, innovation, proactiveness, environmental dynamics, and sustainable organizational action (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). Thus, the present findings extend these theoretical perspectives into the school context by demonstrating that social entrepreneurial action must be integrated at the individual, educational, organizational, and community levels.

Bricolage and creative resource mobilization emerged as a major causal condition. This finding suggests that the scarcity of financial, technological, physical, or administrative resources should not necessarily prevent schools from engaging in social innovation. Instead, teachers, principals, students, families, and local stakeholders can recombine dispersed resources, use existing facilities creatively, mobilize voluntary capacities, and convert local knowledge into practical solutions. This result is consistent with the broader literature, which portrays social entrepreneurs as actors who develop innovative responses despite environmental uncertainty and resource constraints (Mair & Martí, 2006; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). In Iran's education system, where schools may experience unequal access to resources and varying regional capacities, bricolage can enable context-sensitive responses without requiring extensive initial investment. However, the finding should not be interpreted as justification for chronic underfunding. Rather, it highlights the importance of resourcefulness as an entrepreneurial competence that complements formal institutional support. Challenge-based learning can cultivate this competence by exposing students and educators to authentic problems for which no complete set of resources or predefined solution is available (DePryck & Wambacq, 2025; Michel & Förster, 2025). Through such experiences, educational actors learn to reinterpret constraints as design conditions and to identify overlooked assets within their communities.

The attitudes, intentions, and self-efficacy of educational actors constituted the second causal condition. This result indicates that structural reform alone cannot institutionalize social entrepreneurship if teachers, school leaders, and students do not believe that they can generate meaningful social change. Self-efficacy influences whether individuals initiate action, persist when difficulties arise, and interpret setbacks as opportunities for learning rather than evidence of incapacity. The finding closely aligns with research demonstrating that education strengthens social

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entrepreneurship competence partly through the mediating role of self-efficacy (Audah, 2025). It also supports evidence that competence mediates the relationship between social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurial intention (Mao & Yao, 2025). Similarly, entrepreneurship education has been shown to influence students' intentions by improving their attitudes, perceptions of feasibility, and readiness to pursue socially oriented initiatives (Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2025). The conceptual model of social entrepreneurial intention proposed by Tran and von Korflesch further explains that social entrepreneurial action depends on the interaction of perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, values, social norms, and prior experiences (Tran & von Korflesch, 2016). Therefore, teacher development and student education should address emotional and motivational dimensions alongside technical knowledge. Educational actors must be helped to view themselves as legitimate and capable agents of social problem-solving.

The results further showed that the identity and social mission of education form a central contextual condition. This category reflects the idea that schools should not be defined exclusively as institutions responsible for examination performance, curriculum delivery, or preparation for employment. They also carry responsibilities related to educational justice, social solidarity, citizenship, ethical development, and the common good. Social entrepreneurship becomes educationally meaningful when it is connected to this broader mission. The result is consistent with the definition of social entrepreneurship as the prioritization of social value over private benefit (Dees, 2001). It also aligns with Iranian studies showing that social entrepreneurship in education is shaped by cultural values, social responsibilities, organizational mission, and public needs (Davoudi Rad et al., 2021; Mostafazadeh & Haghighat Monfared, 2021). The meta-synthesis conducted by Fazelipour and colleagues likewise identified the interaction of individual, organizational, environmental, cultural, and institutional dimensions in social entrepreneurship development (Fazelipour et al., 2023). The present findings therefore suggest that the legitimacy of social entrepreneurship in Iranian schools depends on presenting it not as an imported market-oriented agenda, but as a means of fulfilling education's social and ethical responsibilities.

The school's role as an ecosystem of social action was another important contextual finding. The participants' accounts indicated that socially entrepreneurial schools must operate through relationships with families, local communities, public institutions, universities, civil-society organizations, and economic actors. Complex educational and social problems cannot be solved effectively by schools acting in isolation. This finding is supported by Ndou and Passiante's emphasis on knowledge ambidexterity, through which social entrepreneurship education combines the exploration of new ideas with the use and transfer of existing knowledge across organizational boundaries (Ndou & Passiante, 2023). It also corresponds with the argument that providers of social entrepreneurship education must themselves display entrepreneurial characteristics, including networking, adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and organizational innovation (Kwong et al., 2022). The school ecosystem therefore provides access to diverse knowledge, expertise, funding, mentoring, social legitimacy, and implementation opportunities. It also allows students to encounter real stakeholders and understand that social value is co-created with communities rather than delivered unilaterally to passive beneficiaries.

Localization according to Iran's contextual requirements was identified as a further condition for successful implementation. This finding reflects the limitations of directly transferring international models without adapting them to the cultural, institutional, administrative, and educational characteristics of Iran. Iranian schools operate within a relatively centralized structure and serve communities characterized by considerable socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural diversity. Consequently, a national model must permit local flexibility while remaining consistent with broader educational policies and culturally recognized values. The finding is consistent with domestic models of social entrepreneurship in higher education, which have emphasized the combined influence of policy, organizational culture, management, environmental conditions, stakeholder support, and educational structures (Davoudi Rad et al., 2021; Mostafazadeh & Haghighat Monfared, 2021). It is also compatible with the curriculum model developed for Iranian higher education, which underlined the need to align objectives, content, pedagogy, and evaluation with social requirements (Hosseini et al., 2022). The rhizomatic curriculum model proposed for primary education similarly supports a flexible, networked, and context-responsive approach rather than a rigid, linear curriculum (Etesami et al., 2026). Localization should therefore involve adapting examples, social challenges, implementation mechanisms, and evaluation indicators to regional needs while preserving the central principles of

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innovation, participation, sustainability, and social value creation.

The identification of a social entrepreneurship curriculum as a principal strategy demonstrates that institutionalization requires planned learning objectives, relevant content, active pedagogies, and coherent assessment. Social entrepreneurship cannot be developed through general encouragement alone. Students need structured opportunities to understand social needs, analyze their causes, identify stakeholders, generate alternative solutions, design implementation plans, mobilize resources, manage projects, and assess social impact. This finding supports Iranian curriculum research emphasizing the necessity of systematic curriculum development for social entrepreneurship (Etesami et al., 2026; Hosseini et al., 2022). It also indicates that the curriculum should integrate cognitive, emotional, ethical, interpersonal, and practical competencies. Social entrepreneurship education must therefore move beyond conventional commercial entrepreneurship content and include empathy, ethical reasoning, social justice, cooperation, resilience, community research, and impact assessment. Such content may be integrated into formal subjects, interdisciplinary projects, extracurricular activities, and school-community programs rather than necessarily being confined to a single independent course.

Experiential and service-oriented learning emerged as the second central strategy. This finding is significant because social entrepreneurship is fundamentally action-based and cannot be learned adequately through lectures or textbook definitions. Students must interact with authentic social problems, communicate with affected groups, test solutions, experience uncertainty, and reflect on the outcomes of their decisions. Active learning in urban education has been shown to strengthen social entrepreneurship by enabling students to engage directly with social challenges and translate learning into action (Capella-Peris et al., 2023). Service-learning and international collaborative projects similarly connect academic content, social responsibility, reflection, and value creation (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). Extracurricular value-creation activities can provide additional spaces in which students generate tangible benefits for external stakeholders while developing entrepreneurial competence (Mukesh et al., 2024). The use of innovation laboratories in medical education likewise demonstrates how discipline-specific knowledge can be applied to the development of socially relevant solutions (Raut & Joshi, 2023). Challenge-based learning in vocational and other educational environments further supports the capacity of authentic problems to cultivate creativity, collaboration, initiative, and practical competence (DePryck & Wambacq, 2025; Michel & Förster, 2025). The present model therefore positions experience not as an optional enrichment activity but as the primary mechanism through which socially entrepreneurial knowledge becomes competence and identity.

The criteria for identifying and evaluating social entrepreneurship were classified as an intervening condition. This finding addresses a major conceptual risk: educational institutions may label any charitable, voluntary, or socially themed activity as social entrepreneurship. Although such activities may be valuable, social entrepreneurship requires additional characteristics, including systematic problem identification, innovation, sustainable value creation, stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization, continuity, and measurable social impact. The distinction is consistent with Dees's emphasis on sustained social mission, opportunity recognition, innovation, accountability, and impact rather than temporary benevolent action (Dees, 2001). It also reflects the process perspective of Mair and Martí, in which social entrepreneurship is evaluated according to its capacity to catalyze meaningful social change (Mair & Martí, 2006). Clear evaluation criteria can guide resource allocation, prevent symbolic or superficial implementation, and enable schools to determine whether projects have produced durable educational and social outcomes. Evaluation should therefore include both process indicators, such as participation and collaboration, and consequence indicators, such as changes in access, well-being, educational equity, community capacity, or the sustainability of the proposed solution.

The final consequences of the model were sustainable social value creation and the institutionalization of social entrepreneurship. These outcomes indicate that the ultimate objective is not simply to increase students' interest in entrepreneurship, but to transform the educational institution's relationship with society. Sustainable social value is produced when school-based initiatives generate lasting benefits for learners, families, communities, or disadvantaged groups and when those benefits exceed the duration of a specific project. Institutionalization occurs when policies, curricula, leadership practices, partnerships, resource mechanisms, and evaluation systems support the continuation and replication of such initiatives. The positive relationships identified in previous studies among entrepreneurship education, competence, self-efficacy, and

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social entrepreneurial intention provide support for the behavioral foundations of these outcomes (Audah, 2025; Mao & Yao, 2025; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2025). However, the present model extends beyond individual intention by explaining how personal readiness can be translated into organizational routines and systemic educational change.

Overall, the findings contribute an integrated explanation of how social entrepreneurship may be developed within Iran's education system. Previous Iranian studies have primarily examined higher education models or curriculum components, whereas the present study connects actor-related drivers, school mission, community ecosystems, localization, curriculum, experiential learning, evaluation, and sustainable outcomes within one paradigmatic framework. The qualitative design and continuation of interviews until theoretical saturation provided an appropriate basis for identifying these interrelated dimensions, consistent with evidence regarding the adequacy of focused, information-rich samples in qualitative research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The resulting framework suggests that institutionalizing social entrepreneurship is not achieved through a single intervention; it requires coordinated policy, organizational, curricular, pedagogical, and community-level reforms.

The study was subject to several limitations. First, its qualitative design and purposive sample of teachers, school principals, educational experts, and university faculty members limit the statistical generalizability of the findings. Although the diversity and professional experience of the participants supported conceptual richness, the model reflects the perspectives of selected informed actors and may not fully represent students, parents, community organizations, private-sector partners, or policymakers. Second, participants' accounts may have been influenced by socially desirable interpretations of entrepreneurship, social responsibility, or educational reform. Third, the study developed a conceptual model but did not examine its effectiveness through field implementation. Differences among provinces, urban and rural schools, school levels, socioeconomic environments, and administrative capacities may influence the applicability of particular components. Finally, the interpretation and integration of qualitative categories inevitably involved researcher judgment, despite the use of systematic coding, constant comparison, and intercoder reliability procedures.

Future studies should quantitatively validate the proposed model using large and geographically diverse samples and examine the relationships among its causal, contextual, strategic, intervening, and outcome components. Researchers should develop reliable instruments for measuring institutionalized social entrepreneurship, educational actors' self-efficacy, school ecosystem capacity, curriculum implementation, experiential learning quality, and sustainable social value. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies could evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum packages, service-learning projects, challenge-based instruction, teacher-training programs, and school-community laboratories. Longitudinal research is also needed to determine whether changes in intention and competence lead to sustained social action over time. Comparative studies across primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education settings could clarify which components are universal and which require level-specific adaptation. Additional qualitative research involving students, parents, local communities, nonprofit organizations, and policymakers would broaden the model and reveal stakeholder-specific barriers and enabling conditions.

Educational policymakers should incorporate social entrepreneurship into national educational objectives while allowing sufficient flexibility for regional and school-level adaptation. Curriculum planners should integrate authentic social problems, community inquiry, collaborative project design, ethical decision-making, resource mobilization, and social-impact assessment into formal and extracurricular programs. Teacher and principal development should strengthen self-efficacy, facilitation skills, partnership building, project management, and challenge-based and service-learning methods. Schools should establish sustained relationships with families, municipalities, universities, civil-society organizations, and local enterprises and create multidisciplinary teams or social innovation laboratories for addressing community needs. Evaluation systems should distinguish sustainable social entrepreneurship from temporary charity by examining innovation, participation, continuity, accountability, and demonstrable social value. Finally, successful initiatives should be documented, supported financially and administratively, shared across schools, and embedded in organizational routines so that their continuation does not depend on individual personnel.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

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Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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