

Conceptualising B' plan through problem-based method: a blended approach

Responsible
Enterprise
Pedagogy

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Abstract

Purpose – Conceptualisation is a primary aspect of any business development. As social enterprises strive to bridge the gap between social mission and financial sustainability, the conceptualisation process requires a careful understanding and analysis of social realities. The conceptualisation process begins with identifying social problems, conducting a detailed analysis of social problems, identifying market gaps, and formulating a plan to address these issues. This study examines the effectiveness of a field-focused, problem-based learning (PBL) approach in strengthening social enterprise conceptualisation among postgraduate students.

Design/methodology/approach – As the focus of the study is on exploratory and developmental pedagogical outcomes rather than causal generalisation, the study used a quasi-experimental single-group pre-post design. It was conducted with 32 students enrolled in a master's programme in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at an Indian university. The pedagogical intervention combined classroom instruction with five structured field visits guided by the design thinking framework. A validated 37-item instrument measuring knowledge, skills, and attitude related to social enterprise conceptualisation was administered before and after the intervention. To test the normality of data, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted. As the post-intervention data set does not meet the normality criteria, the non-parametric statistics (Wilcoxon signed-rank test) were used to analyse the data.

Findings – Findings reveal statistically significant improvements across all three dimensions, with post-intervention scores indicating substantial gains in knowledge, skills, and attitude. These results indicate that field-based PBL is positively associated with students' ability to conceptualise social enterprises grounded in real-world social problems.

Research limitations/implications – The study contributes to the social entrepreneurship education literature by empirically validating an integrated pedagogical approach that foregrounds conceptualisation through experiential, community-engaged learning, offering practical insights for social entrepreneurship curriculum design. The study suggests that structured field immersion may be particularly valuable for problem identification training.

Originality/value – The present study is tests structured intervention, designed using a blended approach (classroom and field) in the Indian context. The originality of the study lies in its incremental contribution to the teaching pedagogy of social enterprise.

Keywords Social problem, Field-focused, Problem-based learning, Pedagogy, Blended approach, Conceptualization

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

In recent times, the adoption of new teaching methods driven toward learner-centric approaches, has become popular and is recognised as the best tool for transferring knowledge and skills to students. Management education adopted this method long ago in the late 1960s and refined it from teacher-centric pedagogy (TCP) to learner-centred pedagogy (LCP). The LCP encourages students to engage deeply with the learning material, develop a dialogue, and engage in self-reflection on their progress (Weimer, 2002). It puts the learners' learning at the centre stage (King, 1993). The educators play the role of a guide who helps students apply and assimilate the gained information to real-world problems. The foundation of learner-centred teaching is rooted in a constructivist framework of learning theory. Constructivists postulate that human beings construct meaning from new and prior experiences based on their



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perceptions and interpretations of the various phenomena (Jonassen, 1991). Hence, instructional design should focus on providing learners with a conducive environment and various tools to interpret the multiple perspectives of the world and create their own worldview (Karagiorgi and Symeou, 2005). Problem-based learning (PBL) is one such learner-centred method in which complex real-world problems are used to stimulate students' thinking and problem-solving abilities during the teaching and learning process. PBL encourages students to identify and research the concepts and principles required to solve complex problems.

PBL is a learner-centred method that aims at developing problem-solving skills among students through self-directed learning as a lifelong habit and teamwork skills (Ali, 2019). In PBL, teams of students solve realistic, unstructured problems from their field of professional practice by defining problems, identifying knowledge gaps, collecting relevant information, and proposing solutions (Ali, 2019). The literature supports that PBL enhances deep learning (Dods, 1997; Gijbels *et al.*, 2005; Ryan *et al.*, 2004), increases critical thinking and ethical reasoning, improves self-directed and independent learning (Kong *et al.*, 2014), improves teamwork, collaboration, understanding of own and other's professional roles (Cooke and Moyle, 2002; Cusack and O'Donoghue, 2012; Kong *et al.*, 2014; Sharp and Primrose, 2003) and even increases attendance (Creggan and Adaair-Creggan, 2015; Lieu, 1996).

2. Research context

In recent years, social enterprises have garnered attention as agents of positive change, particularly for those at the bottom of the pyramid, by overcoming the restrictions in the conception and distribution of pioneering business solutions tailored to the needs of low-income, vulnerable, and/or marginalised communities (Neck and Greene, 2011; Fayolle and Gailly, 2008; Kummitha, 2017). It has drawn attention from all sectors of society, including young people, policymakers, academics, investors, and venture capitalists. Many educational institutes have also started full-fledged social entrepreneurship programmes to train the aspiring youths and practitioners (Neck *et al.*, 2014; Behrendt and Franklin, 2014). Entrepreneurship education encompasses a set of educational tools, methods, and activities designed to instil the entrepreneurial spirit in students, enhance their entrepreneurial awareness, and equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to establish their own projects and institutions (Kummitha, 2016). Running a pilot project is at the core of any entrepreneurship education programme. The journey of a pilot project starts with the conceptualisation of the business idea (Kummitha and Majumdar, 2015). In the case of social enterprises, the business idea is typically related to a social problem that the social entrepreneurs aim to address (Dawid *et al.*, 2022). In many instances, social problems are ambiguous and ill-structured. Recognising and concretising social problems into a sustainable social venture requires grassroots understanding, curiosity, a critical mindset, and theoretical knowledge. A teacher-centric classroom approach is insufficient for imparting such knowledge, skills, and attitudes among students. For this, a learner-centric approach focusing on PBL strategies is germane.

The teaching of "business plan" is the heart of any entrepreneurship course. This is the course where students plan their prospective ventures and learn the skills to pitch their ideas to funders and investors, for securing grants. The beginning of any enterprise planning process starts with identifying opportunities. In the case of social enterprises, these opportunities arise from existing social problems related to education, health, employment, agriculture, poverty, and other social issues. Before working on a business plan, a social entrepreneurship student has to have a clear understanding of what a social problem is. How does it emerge? What is its nature? Who gets affected by it? They need to analyse the social problem in its totality to assess the magnitude and relevance of it and match it with their resources, competencies and market space. In this context, the adoption of a PBL method can bring the best learning outcomes for the social entrepreneurship students. PBL focuses on five learning outcomes, including skill sets such as problem-solving, critical thinking, knowledge acquisition, teamwork, and self-

directed learning. Research findings indicate that the effectiveness of PBL relies on significant guidance from the mentor, as well as relevant background knowledge and skills. Hence, to enable social entrepreneurship students to design a feasible and apt pilot project, they must obtain firsthand information regarding the social realities. This calls for an Field based learning (FBL) approach.

Learning in the field enables students to contextualise and understand ideas more deeply through direct sensory-motor experiences and illustrations with real samples (Chambers, 1994, 2015; Kempa and Orion, 1996). The field setting is also a good venue for developing inquiry in the minds of students because there are numerous ill-defined problems that have no definite answers and can only be solved by integrating knowledge across disciplines. An effective FBL design can provide students with a comprehensive educational experience that holistically develops their knowledge, skills, mindset, and ability to adapt to unforeseen conditions. But firsthand experience without personal reflections and structured guidance cannot achieve the desired learning outcomes. Students can learn about the problem better if the curriculum combines both classroom and FBL components. FBL takes students outside the classroom boundaries to expose them to real-world settings. According to John Dewey, “field experiences are most likely to be academically and intellectually valid if they are carefully planned and monitored, structured to serve specific learning goals, and preceded by orientation and preparation. Students also need ongoing opportunities to critically reflect on what they are learning from the field and to assess the results”. In this context, the present research discusses a pedagogical intervention designed to foster understanding of social realities among students and initiate the process of developing innovative solutions to address social problems.

Research on PBL within entrepreneurship education has tended to privilege outcomes such as entrepreneurial intention, employability, and venture formation. Attention needs to be directed towards how learners engage with the early cognitive and analytical work involved in translating complex social conditions into viable social enterprises. Empirical studies that examine pedagogical processes supporting this stage, particularly those that combine field engagement, problem-based pedagogy, and design thinking, remain limited.

This study responds to this gap by examining a structured field-focussed PBL intervention aimed at developing students’ capacity to identify, examine, and substantiate social problems as the basis for social enterprise development. The research approach was designed to understand the changes in students’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes after participating in the intervention. The findings offer evidence on how experiential and problem-centred pedagogical arrangements shape social enterprise conceptualisation. In doing so, the study provides implications for the design of social entrepreneurship curricula and for educators seeking to integrate field engagement into entrepreneurship education across varied institutional and socio-economic settings.

2.1 Objectives

The present study aims to measure the effectiveness of a “problem-based learning” teaching tool designed with a blended approach, in the conceptualisation process of a social enterprise business plan.

2.2 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study was tested using a pre-post comparison of student performance across the three dimensions.

- H1. Field-focused PBL improves students’ knowledge related to the conceptualisation of social enterprises.
- H2. Field-focused PBL improves students’ skills required for analysing and conceptualising social enterprise ideas.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The present study employs a pre-post single-group Quasi-experimental design to test the effectiveness of a field-focused PBL pedagogy. A single group of research participants is pretested, given the treatment (pedagogical intervention), and then post-tested. This study includes a group of 32 students enrolled in the master's program "Social Innovations and Entrepreneurship" in an Indian University located in a rural area. While field-based learning activities and following classroom discussions were the independent variable of the research, the dependent variable was the students' achievement in conceptualising a social enterprise based on an in-depth understanding of a social problem.

The study sample consists of 32 students in the master's degree program, 15 girls and 17 boys, who were enrolled in the university in the academic year 2022–2023. The university was chosen based on convenience, as the researchers are working in the same university, which makes it possible to plan the intervention and systematically observe the changes that occur in the process. The university is running a master's program "Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship", and the intervention was implemented by the researcher as part of the course teaching. The intervention plan was an outcome of five years of teaching, during which it was partially tested and refined. The fully developed intervention plan was implemented on the sixth batch.

The use of a control group is not preferred, given the embedded nature of the curriculum within the intervention. This is further supported by the ethical constraints associated with withholding experiential learning opportunities from a comparable group of students. When the focus is on exploratory and developmental pedagogical outcomes rather than causal generalisation, such designs can be effective for instructional innovation. To strengthen internal validity, in the absence of a control group, the researchers used the same group of students for pre-test and post-test. And the same instrument was administered under identical conditions during the pre-and post-intervention phases.

As the study involves an active engagement of students directly with the communities, strict ethical guidelines were followed to determine the boundaries of interaction and documentation. Gaining informed consent from the participants was an indispensable part of the interaction process in all visits. To avoid any overshadowing effect of cognitive bias and oversimplification of social realities, after each visit, the students were continuously engaged in reflective analysis and validation of their findings. This is done through classroom discussion and presentation held in the presence of faculty mentors and other group members. As the students are from different socioeconomic, cultural and geographical backgrounds, during the classroom discussion, attention was given to reflect on their own cognitive biases and narrower subjective interpretations. The students were also asked to record only relevant information and be sensitive to the socio-cultural connotations of the participants. The students were asked to respect the community members' right to privacy and avoid any videography, photography and recording without their permission and the necessity of the study.

3.2 Intervention

The pedagogy development began in 2017 as part of the researchers' teaching assignment for the Business Plan course, taught in the master's in social Innovations and Entrepreneurship programme. The intervention was carried in the 2023–24 batch. The intervention was spread over a period of 40 hours. The intervention is designed to align with the design thinking process, which consists of five steps: Emphasise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. The

entire process consists of five field visits, followed by a presentation and intensive classroom discussions within the team and with the mentor.

In the first stage, students are given the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the community, its culture, value system, challenges, experiences, problems, needs, and available resources. At the end of the last field visits, the student is expected to be prepared with an entrepreneurial concept developed to address the social problem they have chosen to work on. The first visit is designed to help students gain a contextualised understanding of what the community is like. What are its resources? What is its culture? How to build rapport with community members? How to communicate with community members?

The second visit orients the students towards analysing the relationship between the demand and supply aspects of the community economy. They learn how to do value chain analysis of economic activities and how the village market functions. They also understand how to work effectively with the team and maintain strong connections with team members. During the third visit, they gain an understanding of various sectors where entrepreneurial intervention are implemented. They are helped to understand how social problems and entrepreneurial interventions are interlinked. They visit various enterprises to understand the financial and market aspects of the enterprise. In the due process, they develop the leadership quality required for becoming an entrepreneur. By the end of the third visit, the students are expected to have reached a decision on which particular sector they want to focus on, based on their competencies and interests. During the fourth visit, the student studies the specific sector in which they want to work. The student interacts with various stakeholders of the enterprise working on his/her selected sector. They analyse the problem in light of all dimensions, taking into account the socio-economic, political, technological, and cultural context. They also understand how to set goals and manage time effectively. At the end of the fourth visit, the students are expected to develop an entrepreneurial concept. Then, along with their mentor (subject matter expert), they conduct a feasibility analysis. At last, during the fifth visit, the student returns to the community to validate the designed entrepreneurial concept. The details of the intervention plan are presented in [Table 1](#).

3.3 Research tool development

For this study, a 5-point Likert scale was constructed following four steps. In the first step, a total of 55 items under three dimensions (knowledge, skill, and attitude) were developed, analysing the existing tools and qualitative data. The qualitative data was collected by in-depth interviews with 20 respondents (15 social entrepreneur graduates and 5 mentors). After studying the items carefully in terms of duplication and overlapping, 11 items were eliminated. In the second step, four out of 44 items were deleted. The deleted items either had a content validity ratio (CVR) < 0.49 ([Lawshe, 1975](#)) or were combined with other items as per the suggestion of content experts. Then, as per the panel members' recommendations, the remaining items were modified. In the third step, each panel member was requested to judge each item on relevancy and clarity by scoring 1–4 as per the content validity index (CVI) ([Waltz et al., 2010](#)). The content validity index for each item was obtained by dividing the number of experts judging the item as relevant by the total number of content experts.

Three out of 40 items having a CVI score < 0.70 were eliminated in the fourth step. Four items having a CVI between 0.70 and 0.79 were modified. Then the modified instrument, having 37 items, was sent again to the panel members. Once they agreed on the item, the scale was finalised with 37 items ([Annexure 1](#)).

4. The Process of Conceptualisation

The process of conceptualising the Social Enterprise plan proceeds in twelve steps, broadly categorised into five stages of Design thinking: empathise, define, ideate, test and prototype. The process is expressed in [Figure 1](#).

Table 1. Detailed field visit plan

Visit-wise process Undertaken			
Visit	Field-based techniques	Class hours	Outcome expectation
First	- Transit walks (Naturalistic observation) - Discussion with various stakeholders (Group discussion)	✓ 6 hours of field visit ✓ 4 hours of classroom discussion	> Rapport-building > Acquaintance with culture > Sensitivity towards community needs > Resource identification > Communication
Second	- Visit to various institutions and occupational sites (Observation and interview)	✓ 8 hours of field visit ✓ 4 hours of classroom discussion	> Value chain analysis > Village Market study > Demand and supply analysis > Teamwork > Cohesion building
Third	- Discussion with local entrepreneurs/ business persons/ leaders (In-depth interview)	✓ 6 hours of field visit ✓ 4 hours of classroom discussion	> Understanding the concept of enterprise > Marketing strategy > Financial understanding > Leadership
Fourth	- Visit to the specific sectoral institutions and stakeholders - (In-depth interview)	✓ 4 hours of field visit ✓ 2 hours of classroom discussion	> Goal setting > Time management > Specific dynamics of the sector > Problems of the sector: problem mapping > Development of the entrepreneurial concept
Fifth	- Revisit the community	✓ 1 hour of field visit ✓ 1 hour of classroom discussion	> Validation of the entrepreneurial concept

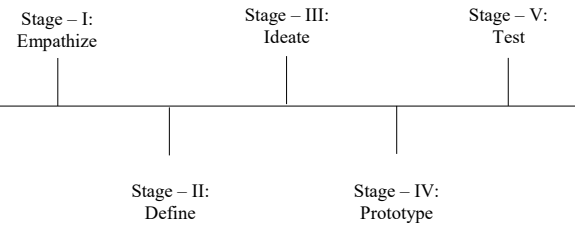


Figure 1. Process of conceptualisation

4.1 Empathize

In the first stage, the student develops a deeper understanding of the various dynamics related to historical, socio-economic, cultural, occupational, physical, and political aspects of the community. The aim is to get a context-specific experience that helps them empathise with the target people. The students gain a deep understanding of what the target people do, say, think, and feel.

4.1.1 Understanding village communities and their dynamics. The social stratification in villages emerged over a period based on the occupation people practice, and rigid caste-based categorisation. The village community comprises people with diverse identities based on religion, caste, class, and occupation, and is guided by different interests. In village the distribution of resources is also unequal; some communities have more resources, while others have fewer. Resource-rich communities have a greater say in the village's decision-making process. Understanding these dynamics helps students gain insight into the socio-economic and political aspects of the village. To understand the village community, their living style, resource availability, and accessibility, students use various Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) [1] tools, including transit walks, community interactions, and observations (Chambers, 1994).

4.1.2 Understanding village livelihood and the challenges involved. In the village, people primarily depend on agriculture and agri-allied activities. In addition to farming, livestock is also considered a supporting source of income. Furthermore, some families continue their traditional occupations, such as pottery, shoemaking, and artisanry, among others. People in the village also run small enterprises based on off-farm or non-farm activities, utilising locally available resources. Regarding the village economy, it is crucial to understand the seasonal calendar to track the pattern of seasonal migration and its impact on the lives and incomes of family members. Understanding the village institutions like SHG (Self Help Group), Farmer groups, and farmer cooperatives, Youth clubs, etc. are also important for entrepreneurship students as they play a crucial role in shaping the village economy. For carrying out this activity, students used stakeholder interaction, FGDs (Focused Group Discussion) and observation.

4.2 Define

After gaining an in-depth knowledge about the community's life and pattern of livelihood, the students observe where the problem requires entrepreneurial intervention.

4.2.1 Synthesize the gathered information and define the problem space. Next, the students list out various problems reflecting on people's responses, and their own observations and understanding about the difficulties faced by the community. While stating problems, they look into diverse segments including gender, age, class, caste, opportunities, and so on. Once they list all potential problems, they conduct an in-depth analysis of each problem in groups and then categorise them into different sectors, such as educational, livelihood, health, agriculture, waste management, and so on.

4.2.2 Identify the entrepreneurial opportunities. Once the problems are categorised into different sectors, the student has a discussion on opportunities and threats of the sector, drawing on experiences from the field and analysis of the macro social entrepreneurial ecosystem.

4.2.3 Problem analysis in the specific sector. After this, the student is helped to arrive at a specific sector he/she is interested in working on, matching his/her interest, knowledge, and experience. Then the student is helped to prepare a set of questions to understand the sectoral problem in depth. To accomplish this task, the student goes back to the field to collect information from various stakeholders, including community leaders, Govt officials, civil society officials, and people facing the particular problem. After gaining an in-depth understanding of the sector, the students categorise the problems into three categories; local, systemic, and structural.

4.2.4 Competency mapping. After segregating the problems into local, systemic, and structural levels, the students need to identify which problem they want to work on. For this, they must understand their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their skills, knowledge, education, work experience, social network, and resource accessibility.

4.2.5 Resource mapping. In addition to competency mapping, it is essential to do resource mapping before choosing a particular problem to work on. The students make a map of the

resources (financial, human, technological, physical) that they have and what they can access. After analysing the competencies and resources they have and their interests, they finalise the specific problem to work on.

4.3 Ideate

In the define phase, the student finalizes the specific problem he/she want to work on. Again, the student does a complete analysis of the chosen problem. At this stage, they utilise various problem-solving tools, such as PESTEL, Problem Tree Analysis, and Fishbone Analysis, to capture the root causes of the problem. Once the problem statement is finalized, the students are provided with the scope to generate multiple possible entrepreneurial interventions to address the defined problem. At this stage, competency mapping and resource mapping are conducted once again.

4.3.1 *Competency mapping* is done to see whether the required human potential matches the available talents. 4.3.2 *Resource mapping* is done to ensure that the necessary tools, budgets, technical know-how, and broad organisational inputs are available and accessible for the entrepreneur to implement the idea. 4.3.3 *Market survey and competitor analysis.* Next, the students do a market survey to understand the demand and supply gap. This helps students understand the existing market linkages and distribution channels. The students also need to understand the existing competitors, their strengths and weaknesses. This exercise helps them to understand where and how to place their product/service in the market (Positioning of the product/service).

4.4 Prototype

Finally, the student gets ready with the prototype, which is a realistic (tangible or intangible) representation of the solution designed to address the specific problem. The prototype is presented to the team in the presence of the mentor and other faculty members to get feedback for its improvement.

4.5 Test

Once the prototype is finalized, it is time for the students to again go back to the community to check whether the solution they have designed is apt to address the need/problem faced by the target group. It is presented to the target group to get feedback before moving ahead with the venture plan.

5. Results

Table 2 explains the reliability statistics. Internal consistency reliability of the final 37-item instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. The results indicate satisfactory reliability across all three dimensions, with alpha coefficients of 0.84 for Knowledge, 0.85 for Skills, and 0.87 for Attitude, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally and

Table 2. Reliability statistics

Reliability statistics		
Category	Cronbach’s alpha	No of variables
Knowledge	0.842	24
Skill	0.857	10
Attitude	0.871	3

Bernstein, 1994). These values suggest adequate internal consistency for measuring changes in learning outcomes following the intervention.

Table 3 explains Effect Size Statistics viz., Cohen's d and Hedges' g . The observed effects more than the threshold value (Small Effect = 0.2, Medium Effect = 0.5 and Large Effect = 0.8) and values above 1.20 are considered a very large effect (Sawilowsky, 2009). The observed effects for Knowledge ($g = 8.127$), Skill ($g = 5.314$) and Attitude ($g = 6.578$) represent an extreme magnitude, significantly exceeding standard benchmarks for a large effect. Such a large effect could be possible, maybe due to the tight sample having less variability. Another reason might be the effect of other taught courses (Financial management, Resource management, and Marketing management) during the same semester as part of the curriculum design.

The Table 4 explains test of normality, Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test used to determine the sample distribution. The sample data shows pre and post intervention phase. The pre-intervention scores appear normally distributed and post intervention scores significantly deviate from normal distribution. Pre-intervention score of both tests shows p -values above.05. Hence, the hypothesis fails to reject null hypothesis, post-intervention both test shows p -value below.05. Hence, reject the null hypothesis.

As the post-intervention data were not normally distributed, to measure the effect of intervention, the non-parametric statistics, the Wilcoxon Signed rank test, was used to compare pre and post intervention scores.

To assess the impact of the field-focused problem-based learning intervention, pre- and post-intervention scores (Annexure 2) for knowledge, skills, and attitude were analysed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The results are summarised in Table 5. Across all three outcome domains, post-intervention scores differed significantly from baseline measures.

Knowledge scores increased from a pre-intervention mean of 1.89 to a post-intervention mean of 4.31. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that this change was statistically significant. A similar pattern was observed for skills, with mean scores rising from 2.25 before the intervention to 4.31 following its completion. Attitude scores also indicated a statistically significant shift, increasing from a pre- mean of 2.01 to a post- mean of 4.44.

These findings together support the hypothesis designed, indicating that the field-based intervention is associated with changes in the knowledge base, skills and attitudes of the students in relation to social enterprise conceptualisation (Table 6).

Table 3. Effect size statistics

Category	Cohen's d	Correction Factor J	Hedges' g
Knowledge	8.235	0.988	8.127
Skill	5.379	0.988	5.314
Attitude	6.659	0.988	6.578

Table 4. Tests of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre- Intervention	0.139	32	0.118	0.975	32	0.643
Post- Intervention	0.212	32	0.001	0.701	32	0.000

Note(s): ^a Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 5. Wilcoxon ranked test

Variable	Test	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Mean rank	Z	Sig.
Knowledge	Pre	1.89	0.273	1.42	2.58	16.50	-4.938	0.001
	Post	4.31	0.271	3.63	4.88			
Skill	Pre	2.25	0.274	1.70	2.80	17.00	-4.923	0.001
	Post	4.31	0.468	2.20	4.80			
Attitude	Pre	2.01	0.427	1.33	3.33	16.50	-4.958	0.001
	Post	4.44	0.290	3.67	4.67			

Note(s): Z values are based on Wilcoxon signed-rank tests. *p*-values are two-tailed

Table 6. Results of hypothesis

Hypothesis	Description	Key result	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
H1	Field-focused PBL improves students’ knowledge related to social enterprise conceptualisation	Z = -4.938	<0.001	Accepted
H2	Field-focused PBL improves students’ skills required for analysing and conceptualising social enterprise ideas	Z = -4.923	<0.001	Accepted
H3	Field-focused PBL enhances students’ attitudes towards social problem identification and social entrepreneurship	Z = -4.958	<0.001	Accepted

Note(s): All tests were conducted using two-tailed Wilcoxon signed-rank tests at the 0.05 significance level

6. Discussion

Social entrepreneurship has gained momentum over the last few decades in the world, and India is not an exception. In India, many universities have been offering social entrepreneurship programmes. In addition, incubation centres and non-governmental organisations are also developing their start-up programmes to teach concepts of social entrepreneurship to aspiring youth. Students who joined these programmes are socially conscious, look for better opportunities, and have a favourable ecosystem (Swain and Patoju, 2022).

Entrepreneurship courses in universities around the globe are based on the accepted notion that there is a teachable and learnable core in entrepreneurship (Chandra *et al.*, 2024; Henry *et al.*, 2005; Wee, 2004). Though many experiential pedagogies have emerged around this notion, there is still no consensus on the content (what is taught), process (how it is taught) and to whom (in what context) it is taught (Hilliard, 2021; Bhatia and Levina, 2020; Aadland and Aaboen, 2020; Nabi *et al.*, 2017; Valliere, 2014; Torrance, 2015; Neck and Greene, 2011; Solomon, 2007; Fiet, 2001). The common criticism of the entrepreneurial education has centred around the opinion that entrepreneurship programs passively teach the phenomena of entrepreneurship rather than actively engaging the students in the how-to aspects of becoming an entrepreneur (Hoppe *et al.*, 2017; Johansson and Rosell, 2014; Samwel Mwasalwiba, 2010). Therefore, there is increasing emphasis on using theory and pedagogy to develop entrepreneurial attributes and competencies that enable learners to identify and exploit opportunities in new and uncertain environments (Allen, 2022; Collins *et al.*, 2006; Kirby, 2007). The literature broadly mentions “active pedagogy” as important for fostering entrepreneurial attitude (Olokundun *et al.*, 2018), entrepreneurial intention (Mukesh *et al.*, 2020), and the ability to perform their tasks outside the limits of formally taught courses (Kember and Leung, 2005). Research has shown that active and problem-oriented teaching methods have an impact on students’ reasoning skills and deeper understanding (Ball and

Pelco, 2006; Zaring *et al.*, 2021), dialogic communication processes (Robertson, 2018) and motivational dynamics (Pischetola and Heinsfeld, 2018).

In social entrepreneurial education, learning depends on an iterative process, in constant dialogue with the real world, where active pedagogy plays a significant role (Blank, 2013). Conceptualising social venture involves a rigorous process of developing a thorough understanding and analysis of social problems, gaining social consciousness, and empathy towards people's problems. To turn the existing market gaps into meaningful opportunities for intervention, the students need exposure to the ground realities. Here, PBL, which provides students a scope for open enquiry in a less structured frame, is an apt pedagogy. But to deal with ill-defined, complex real-world problems, field-focused experiential learning plays an important role in understanding the ground realities. Community visits, spending time with people, understanding their lifestyle, studying and analysing the roots of their problems, and understanding push and pull factors of the problem are essential components of field-based learning (DeGiacomo, 2002; DiConti, 2004). However, field visits without critical reflection and theoretical linking are not sufficient. Pepin (2018) asserted in his model "learning to be enterprising" that reflection is what ensures constant learning throughout the entire course of entrepreneurial actions: planning, implementing and assessment.

The findings of the present research support that structured field-focused PBL can positively influence the learning of the students concerning the conceptualisation of social enterprises. From a theoretical perspective, the results align with constructivist and experiential learning frameworks, which posit that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with real-life contexts. This study extends existing literature by empirically demonstrating how these pedagogical approaches can be systematically applied to the conceptualisation phase of social enterprise development (Karagiorgi and Symeou, 2005). Increase in knowledge, skills, and attitudes score is indicative of how immersive engagement with real-life problems could positively influence the process of social enterprise conceptualisation. This also encourages a move from theory-based to context-based learning. This reinforces the argument that early-stage conceptualisation in social entrepreneurship cannot be effectively developed through classroom instruction alone (Kickul *et al.*, 2010; Oberoi *et al.*, 2021). By integrating problem-based learning with field immersion and classroom discussion in the frame of design thinking, the intervention facilitated iterative cycles of observation, reflection, analysis, and validation. The process has strengthened the problem sensitivity, analytical reasoning, and empathetic engagement capabilities of the students. These are central to social entrepreneurship, adding towards the pedagogy in traditional business plans.

The findings are consistent with prior studies that highlight the effectiveness of problem-based and experiential learning approaches in entrepreneurship education (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; San Tan and Ng, 2006; Singh, 2025). Studies that foster deep learning, critical thinking, and self-directed learning (Singh *et al.*, 2023; Swain and Patoju, 2022). The present research highlights how students learn to identify, analyse, and validate social problems as entrepreneurial opportunities (Smith and Woodworth, 2012; Hansen, 2020; Younas *et al.*, 2025).

Importantly, the results suggest that PBL with field engagement plays a critical role in shaping students' attitudes towards social problems, transforming them from passive observers into active problem-solvers. This attitudinal shift is particularly relevant in the context of social entrepreneurship education, where empathy, ethical sensitivity, and contextual awareness are as important as technical competencies.

7. Conclusion

In developing countries, the co-existence of social enterprises along with the state is required to solve various social problems. The success of social enterprises is comparatively lower than that of pure profit enterprises, due to their non-profit nature. In some cases, lack of innovation,

faulty strategies and context also play a significant role in the failure of social enterprises. Keeping in view with the growing number of aspiring youths, in India, many universities have started offering social entrepreneurship education, wherein students come up with solutions to various problems and implement or test the feasibility of their designed solution. The present research emphasises that the first step of such activity starts with identifying a problem and validating the problem. This kind of exercises makes students strong and provide confidence and increase the success rate of social enterprises. The study contributes to pedagogy by offering evidence that carefully designed field-focussed PBL interventions can serve as an effective bridge between theoretical instruction and socially grounded entrepreneurial practice.

7.1 Limitations

The findings of the study are subjected to certain limitations. The ability to make strong causal claims is reduced due to the absence of a control group as acknowledged in the research design. The sample was drawn from a single university, and the intervention was embedded in a postgraduate programme, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to institutional or cultural contexts. Additionally, the researchers were involved in the design and delivery of the pedagogical intervention as part of their teaching responsibilities. However, this positionality enabled close observation and contextual understanding of the learning process. To mitigate this, standardised instruments and identical procedures were used during pre- and post-intervention data collection. Future studies may address these limitations by employing multi-institutional samples, control groups, and independent facilitators, as well as conducting longitudinal assessments of learning outcomes.

7.2 Note for teaching

For carrying this exercise, students can be made into groups. Students need to understand the local language. Students need preparation to identify a village/community. Before proceeding to the field visit students need to be taught concepts like rapport building, stakeholder analysis, community engagement, social stratification, transit walk, focused group discussion, interviews etc. Students need to prepare handouts for visiting villages.

7.3 Resources needed for field visits

To carry out this activity, the instructor needs to have a thorough knowledge about the community. This will enable the instructor to provide assistance to the student during the field visit and field activities. Students can deploy as a group and make sure at least one or two students speak the local language. The activity needs logistic support and minimum stationery to perform participatory rural appraisal and other activities.

Table A1. Knowledge, skill and attitude scale

S.No.	Cat	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	K	I know what a social problem is	1	2	3	4	5
2	K	I know how to identify a social problem	1	2	3	4	5
3	K	I know how to analyse a social problem	1	2	3	4	5
4	K	I know how to carry out the problem mapping activity	1	2	3	4	5
5	K	I know how to categorize social problems into different themes	1	2	3	4	5
6	K	I know stakeholder analysis	1	2	3	4	5
7	K	I know how village institutions work	1	2	3	4	5
8	K	I know what resources are available in the village	1	2	3	4	5
9	K	I know how to map the village resources	1	2	3	4	5
10	K	I know the socio-economic dynamics in the village	1	2	3	4	5
11	K	I know the occupational structure of the village	1	2	3	4	5
12	K	I know the problems faced by the farmers	1	2	3	4	5
13	K	I know agricultural value chain analysis	1	2	3	4	5
14	K	I know the value addition process of agricultural produce	1	2	3	4	5
15	K	I know the characteristics of potential customers	1	2	3	4	5
16	K	I know the advantages and disadvantages of the products/ services existing in the market	1	2	3	4	5
17	K	I know the minimum capital necessary to set up an enterprise	1	2	3	4	5
18	K	I know the business responsibility of the partners in an enterprise are	1	2	3	4	5
19	K	I know the processes and procedures for setting up an enterprise	1	2	3	4	5
20	K	I know how to understand the organisational structure of an enterprise	1	2	3	4	5
21	K	I know the elements of an economic-financial plan of an enterprise	1	2	3	4	5
22	K	I know the marketing process of an enterprise	1	2	3	4	5
23	K	I know the technical characteristics of product/service	1	2	3	4	5
24	K	I know what logotype is, how it is made and what is it for	1	2	3	4	5
25	S	I can interact with community people easily	1	2	3	4	5
26	S	I manage my time well	1	2	3	4	5

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

S.No.	Cat	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
27	S	I can deal with any crisis effectively	1	2	3	4	5
28	S	I can efficiently work in a team	1	2	3	4	5
29	S	I have good observation skill	1	2	3	4	5
30	S	I have good leadership skill	1	2	3	4	5
31	S	I am a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
32	S	I have competitor analysis skill	1	2	3	4	5
33	S	I have the competency mapping skill	1	2	3	4	5
34	S	I am good at understanding people's problem	1	2	3	4	5
35	A	I am sensitive towards people's problem	1	2	3	4	5
36	A	I am sensitive towards people's culture	1	2	3	4	5
37	A	I see every social problem as an opportunity	1	2	3	4	5

Annexure 2

Table A2. Respondents scores

Case	Pre (K)	Post (K)	D	R	Pre (S)	Post (S)	D	R	Pre (A)	Post (A)	D	R
1	1.92	4.33	2.41	9.5	2.50	4.20	1.70	6	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
2	1.75	4.75	3.00	28	2.10	4.70	2.6	28.5	1.67	4.67	3.00	28.5
3	2.08	4.38	2.30	12	2.20	4.40	2.2	16	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
4	2.04	4.13	2.09	6	2.20	4.40	2.2	16	2.67	4.33	1.66	3.5
5	2.21	4.33	2.12	7.5	2.10	4.50	2.4	24	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
6	2.58	4.29	1.71	2	2.80	3.80	1.0	2	1.67	4.00	2.33	10
7	1.96	3.63	1.67	1	2.00	3.90	1.9	7.5	2.00	4.00	2.00	7.5
8	2.54	4.50	1.96	3	2.10	4.60	2.5	26.5	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
9	1.71	3.96	2.25	10	2.20	4.50	2.3	20.5	1.67	4.33	2.67	20
10	1.96	4.38	2.42	17.5	1.90	4.20	2.3	20.5	1.67	4.33	2.67	20
11	1.67	3.71	2.04	5	2.50	4.00	1.5	3	1.67	4.30	2.67	20
12	1.75	4.50	2.75	23	2.20	4.40	2.2	16	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
13	1.46	3.88	2.42	17.5	1.80	3.90	2.1	11.5	2.33	3.67	1.34	1.5
14	1.58	4.38	2.80	21.5	2.10	4.20	2.1	11.5	1.67	4.33	2.67	20
15	1.67	4.88	3.21	29	2.40	4.80	2.4	24	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
16	1.96	4.08	2.12	7.5	2.10	4.80	2.7	30.5	1.33	4.67	3.34	31
17	2.33	4.33	2.00	4	2.70	2.20	0.5	1	3.33	4.67	1.34	1.5
18	2.08	4.5	2.42	17.5	2.70	4.60	1.9	7.5	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
19	1.75	4.13	2.38	14.5	2.40	4.40	2.0	9	1.67	4.67	3.00	28.5
20	1.71	4.33	2.62	21	2.30	4.50	2.2	16	1.67	4.33	2.66	13
21	1.63	4.54	2.91	26	2.00	4.70	2.7	30.5	2.00	4.00	2.00	7.5
22	1.83	4.42	2.59	20	1.80	4.30	2.5	26.5	2.33	4.67	2.34	11.5
23	1.92	4.63	2.71	22	1.70	4.30	2.6	28.5	2.67	4.67	2.00	7.5
24	1.67	4.67	3.00	28	2.20	4.60	2.4	24	2.33	4.67	2.34	11.5
25	1.79	4.13	2.34	13	2.60	4.70	2.1	11.5	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
26	2.0	4.17	2.17	9	2.10	4.40	2.3	20.5	1.33	4.00	2.67	20
27	1.83	4.25	2.42	17.5	2.50	4.50	3.0	32	1.67	4.67	3.00	28.5

(continued)

Table A2. Continued

Case	Pre (K)	Post (K)	D	R	Pre (S)	Post (S)	D	R	Pre (A)	Post (A)	D	R
28	1.92	4.33	2.41	9.5	2.60	4.20	1.6	4.5	2.33	4.00	1.67	5
29	1.58	4.38	2.80	24.5	2.40	4.00	1.6	4.5	2.33	4.33	2.00	7.5
30	1.42	4.42	3.00	28	2.30	4.40	2.1	11.5	2.00	4.67	2.67	20
31	2.08	4.46	2.38	14.5	2.20	4.50	2.3	20.5	1.67	4.67	3.00	28.5
32	2.00	4.29	2.29	11	2.40	4.60	2.2	16	2.67	4.33	1.66	3.5

Note(s): K: Knowledge, S: Skill, A: Attitude, D: Difference, R: Rank

Note

1. “Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is an approach used in the agricultural system to involve rural communities for their knowledge and opinions on the specific matter with the aims to incorporate their knowledge and opinions in the planning and management of developmental projects or programmes. Participatory rural appraisal can be achieved through mapping and modelling, transect walks, matrix scoring, seasonal calendars, trend and change analysis, well-being and wealth ranking and grouping, and analytical diagramming”.

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Further reading

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