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## AWARENESS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

*Social entrepreneurship can act as an intermediary to strengthen the economy, environment, society, politics, and education locally and globally. A training platform is among the activities planned and implemented during the social entrepreneurship activity process. In this context, this study aims to reveal the views, perceptions, and perspectives of undergraduate students about social entrepreneurship with the information they have acquired in the entrepreneurship course at the university institution. Since undergraduate students studying at universities are social entrepreneur candidates of the future, their interests, expectations and knowledge levels constitute the main lines of the study. The study adopted a qualitative research method, and 'focus group interview' and 'unstructured observation' were used in data collection methods. The research study group consisted of 20 undergraduate students studying at a foundation university in the TRNC in the 2019-2020 academic year. As a result of the study, it was observed that the information that the students learned in the entrepreneurship course indirectly affected their awareness of social entrepreneurship.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, Social entrepreneurship, Undergraduate students, Focus group.*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of social entrepreneurship has become an important concept that is shaped and developing according to the needs of today's societies. This process has become the focus of people and universities, and researchers (Günlü, 2015). One of the most important reasons for the popularity of social entrepreneurship is the stories formed while seeking answers to the questions of 'why and how. Based on these entrepreneurship stories, there are situations such as contributing to society, efforts for self-realization, serving, and finding solutions to social problems (Günlü, 2015). Although there is no complete definition of social entrepreneurship in the literature, there are definitions developed by practitioners and researchers according to themselves. Dees and Hass (1998) argue that social entrepreneurship is loaded with different meanings for different people.

The purpose of this research is to reveal the students' views, perceptions, and perspectives on social entrepreneurship with the knowledge they have acquired within the scope of the 'Entrepreneurship' course offered as an elective course to undergraduate students at universities.

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Since undergraduate students studying at universities are social entrepreneur candidates of the future, their interests, expectations, and knowledge levels constitute the main lines of the study.

### *Conceptual Framework*

#### *Social Entrepreneur Concept, Definition, and Characteristics*

It is seen that the characteristics specific to social entrepreneurs are handled in five basic steps: demographic characteristics, personal characteristics, cognitive characteristics, personal values, and motivational characteristics (Caldwell *et al.*, 2016; İçerli & Karadal, 2016; Işık & Aydın, 2017; Teulon & Fernandez, 2017). Demographic features of social entrepreneurs include gender, age, education, and family background. Personality traits are perseverance, optimism, internal locus of control, and risk-taking tendency. Cognitive characteristics include self-efficacy, innovativeness, seeing opportunities, and leadership. Personal values are spirituality, social responsibility, altruism, morality, honesty, and empathy. And finally, motivational traits include the need for achievement, the need for superiority, and the need for autonomy (Hoogendoorn, 2016; İnci, 2016; García-Bedoya *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, social entrepreneurs are also evaluated within the scope of diligence. In her study, Burger (2006) states that the rigor dimension refers to the discipline that a person develops while initiating, planning, implementing, and controlling the results and the control processes she manages. It is stated that individuals with a high value from the meticulousness dimension are organized quickly and easily, act relatively under certainty, and plan. Therefore, they are perfectionists and adhere to the rules in their work (Burger, 2006). It is important for social entrepreneurship stakeholders, who have conciliatory and mediator qualities, to approach people who are victims of the problems created by other entrepreneurs with empathy. In this context, reconciliation should be the most important impulse for maintaining social entrepreneurship and efficient use of human resources (İrengün & Arikboğa, 2015; Gupta *et al.*, 2020; Torres & Augusto, 2020). Social entrepreneurs are expected to be motivated by the opportunities they define and the process of realizing their ideas, not by financial gains due to inequalities in benevolence and monetization (Martin & Osberg, 2007).



#### *Social Entrepreneurship and Development of Social Entrepreneurs*

Social entrepreneurship applications, which Ashoka first established in 1980, have found a place among the preferred business areas, especially in the last ten years, as a rising entrepreneurship trend globally and especially in developing countries (Quarter *et al.*, 2014). Two points seem to be historically important in the development of social entrepreneurship; The first is the opening of space for the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship and the second is the rapid rise of interest in social entrepreneurship. The development of social entrepreneurship has variability primarily due to the difference in the field of entrepreneurship it has. In this sense, it can be said that there are two different areas of social entrepreneurship as practice and academia (Besler, 2010). In practice, it is accepted that social entrepreneurs have existed for centuries as actors that offer deep and sustainable solutions to social problems.

Although historically, the evaluation of the concept of social entrepreneurship in Turkey is new compared to European and American practices, it is possible to remember the phenomenon as a

historical origin in the establishment process of the country. It is possible to express the names of Yusuf Ziya Bey, the founder of Darüşşafaka in 1872, Princess Zeynep Kamil, the founder of Zeynep Kamil Hospital in 1862, and Mesut Cemil, who founded the radio in the first years of the Republic, as social entrepreneurs in the history of Turkey (Denizalp, 2009). Apart from these individual and deep-rooted practices, it is worth noting that social entrepreneurship practices were among the suggestions as a nation development model in the Republic's early years. The work titled *In the Land of White Lilies* (Petrov, 1923; Anzum, 2020), which deals with the recovery of the Finnish nation from difficult conditions with a struggle of high solidarity, was met with interest by Atatürk. He demanded that this study, which can be presented as an example of the contribution of social entrepreneurship to the development of a nation, should be included in the curricula of military schools. İçli and Anıl (2016) state that there are historical roots in Turkey's social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship issues. However, conceptually, the arrival of these phenomena in the country is temporally delayed, and they still maintain the same slowness at the point of development. Despite this, although a consensus has not been reached in the literature yet, it is seen that the popularity and prestige of the related concepts in practice have reached significant positive levels due to the entrepreneurial aspect. Although social entrepreneurs have taken place in various fields in the history of Turkey, it is stated that the social entrepreneurship naming and social entrepreneurship awareness started in 2000 in Turkey (Denizalp, 2009; García-González & Ramírez-Montoya, 2020; Urban, 2020). At this point, the activities of Ashoka and Schwab Foundations, which are among the foundations that fulfill the function of networking and providing capital support with social entrepreneurs worldwide, stand out in Turkey.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Within the scope of the study, 'focus group interview' and 'unstructured observation,' which are data collection methods in qualitative research, will be used. Focus group discussions; are frequently used in market research, health management research, sociology and communication research, evaluations in applied fields, development of educational materials, and educational research (Yılmaz & Oğuz, 2011). A focus group interview uses the effect of group dynamics in an unstructured interview and discussion between a small group and the leader to obtain in-depth information and generate ideas. Focus group interviews can be defined as a qualitative data collection technique, which is carried out within the framework of predetermined guidelines, by the logic of this method, prioritizing the subjectivity of the interviewees, and attention should be paid to the discourse of the participants and the social context of this discourse (Yılmaz & Oğuz, 2011; Aljarbou *et al.*, 2020). Considering these features and definitions of focus group interviews, data were collected by conducting focus group work in short periods at the end of the 'Entrepreneurship' course that undergraduate students with different demographic and social characteristics take as an elective. The research study group consists of 20 undergraduate students studying at a foundation university in the TRNC in the 2019-2020 academic year. Interview questions for data collection in focus group studies were shaped according to the subject of the relevant course. According to Krueger (1998), the order of the questions can be as follows:



1. Opening
2. Introduction questions
3. Transition questions
4. Key questions
5. Research questions
6. Closing question
7. Final question (Yılmaz & Oğuz, 2011).

During the focus group meeting, while the moderator played an active role in the planning and management of the interview, the rapporteur took notes on the details and questions of the relevant meeting.

Another method to be used in the related research is ‘observation.’ Contrary to some misunderstandings, observation can be made with the eye and all the sense organs. In case of inadequacy of the sense organs, observation tools can be used to increase their power (Karasar, 2005; Jafarpour & Abdoli, 2019).

The data collected through video and audio recordings, focus group work, and unstructured observation notes taken during the relevant workshops with the participants were analyzed by content analysis, qualitative research methods. The codes and anecdotes that emerged with content analysis and thematic coding were evaluated in themes and sub-themes, and the findings were obtained and interpreted.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

our themes emerged in line with the findings of the focus group study and observation notes. During the focus group study, the findings obtained in line with the people’s opinions were categorized. These categories are as follows; ‘Perspective against entrepreneurship and awareness of social entrepreneurship, Social entrepreneurship and social responsibility distinction, Basic characteristics and educational status of social entrepreneurs, Social entrepreneurship in career planning.’

### *Perspective on Entrepreneurship and Awareness on Social Entrepreneurship*

The most striking situation in the findings, which were handled in line with the participants’ opinions, is that the individuals took the entrepreneurship course they took as a compulsory elective by the university curriculum. In addition, the students stated that they were included in this course to apply for the funds that they received financial support within the scope of their career planning and entrepreneurs are supported, and to get a certificate. The results show that the faculty member who comes to the course greatly influences the selection of this course. This is an exceptional case that is handled outside the subject. The students gave the following answers to the questions about the purpose of choosing the course. Contributing to the category of international students, the participant stated that he took the course willingly, anticipating that he would work in this field in the future in line with his ideas.

*-Volkan: I bought it to apply for certificates, KOSGEP loans, etc. I thought it would come up somewhere; we might need it.*

When the general views of the participants are examined, it is seen that only the social entrepreneurship situation mentioned in the course is not known due to its absence in the educational environments and curricula in the following periods or before, and it is seen that the students have an unfamiliar approach to this concept. There is a conceptual link between entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. It is known that although the goals in entrepreneurship and the goals and characteristics in the social entrepreneurship environment are different from each other, it is a concept that has a multiple dynamics from the characteristics of the social entrepreneur. Although the concept of entrepreneurship is known among the people as a person who started a new business, this concept has a rich history. The fact that the participants were not aware of this concept can be shown among the remarkable findings.

*-Altan: In one part of the textbook, there were different types of entrepreneurship; we saw social entrepreneurs as entrepreneurs who exist to provide a social benefit. Although a social entrepreneur is considered as a non-profit and only socially beneficial person, he/she needs to generate profit and income to provide social benefit. Social entrepreneurs do this.*

When the participants' perspectives towards the concept of social entrepreneurship are considered, it is observed that this concept is generally associated with social responsibility. Since a person put forward this idea, the perspective and course of the interview progressed from social responsibility projects. The situation put forward by Umut, one of the participants in the non-profit support of social issues and the situation of solving the problems and making them better.

*-Payende: Giving direct help means giving directly to those who need it, but helping activities means teaching people what they can do in line with their needs. In this way, they can meet their own needs for a longer period of time. The social entrepreneur 'teaches how to fish by not giving the fish directly'.*

Volkan, one of the participants, states that he heard about the social entrepreneurship course in the entrepreneurship course. While conveying his opinion on the subject, they also aim to make the names better in the society as an institution. It is emphasized by the participants that one of the most important reasons for the construction phase of social responsibility projects is within the scope of the companies' prestige studies.

*-Volkan: I heard it in entrepreneurship class too. The business can engage in social entrepreneurship for strategic purposes in line with its own interests. In order to better show its corporate name. It is possible for a business known for a bad situation to take such a path to clear it up and clear itself. They can do social responsibility projects. I think there are only charitable foundations and associations, as well as places that do this for strategic purposes.*

Within the scope of the given anecdote, the participants draw attention to the importance of their small work to make a difference and that these small ideas are important for the benefit of society. Putting the ideas put into practice makes the lives of people and societies easier in general, and all kinds of help also contribute to the creation of awareness.



*-Onore Even if it is a small business, it is very important to make a difference. As a social entrepreneurship, plastic bag usage fee has come in Turkey, plastic bags harm the environment, if a small entrepreneur produces bags from cloth here, it can make a difference in the environment and an economic income can be obtained with small fees. What is produced is beneficial to society.*

The findings obtained in line with the participants' opinions showed that the participants did not have a good grasp of the concepts of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship and that the information learned within the scope of the course was not permanent due to the lack of application stages. It is seen that the concept of social entrepreneurship is tried to be defined by students in the light of reasoning and other information, and students do not have pure knowledge of the depth of the concept. In this context, considering that the concepts of social responsibility and social entrepreneurship are intertwined, it is necessary to examine this situation in the next category.

#### *Social Entrepreneurship and Social Responsibility Distinction*

Social entrepreneurship situations need to be built on the foundations of an idea from the start. A detailed project and the project's supporting stakeholders are primarily needed to realize a work. Perçem, one of the participants, gave examples from the institutions where social responsibility projects are carried out.

*- Perçem: In order to start social responsibility projects, it is necessary to have the spirit of this business. In order for a business to be realized, it is necessary to have a primary idea. An institution cannot realize that project without having a social entrepreneurship phenomenon. The holding, which made a project about vocational high schools under the name of social entrepreneurship, became a social entrepreneur and realized a project.*

Considering the answers given by the participants within the scope of the question about whether social entrepreneurship situations are made within a certain framework or are one-sided, it was concluded that all kinds of situations that directly or indirectly affect society are included in the field of social entrepreneurship. Within the scope of the definition made by Miraç, one of the participants, it is emphasized that the social entrepreneur should achieve his goals with this material flow by earning a certain level of profit to benefit society. In this context, social responsibility projects and activities of enterprises can also be discussed in the field of social entrepreneurship.

*-Miraç: I think it has a certain category. I think this situation is progressing with the aim of smoothing out the problems in society. While entrepreneurship aims to rise with a certain idea and make a profit, the social entrepreneur needs to make a certain profit in order to provide a benefit to the society in order to achieve other goals. I don't think it's in a specific context. Apart from the activities of the enterprises, they may aim to help people or animals on the street, in cases of natural disasters, they may send a certain part of the profits of the business activities there, which is actually a social responsibility.*



Within the scope of the opinion given by one of the participants, Altan, the goals that emerged in line with the purpose and ideas of the social entrepreneur are also considered important. Public awareness activities are perceived as the duty of social entrepreneurs. In line with the participants' opinions, it is expected that the problems that come to the fore in society will be sought for solutions through such awareness-raising activities. It can also be evaluated as the ability to stand and struggle against social problems.

*-Altan: You have to look at the entrepreneur. Is the entrepreneur only a social entrepreneur or a commercial activity? To think of it as two types of entrepreneurs, the profit-oriented entrepreneur appeals to a certain audience within the framework of his own business. A social entrepreneur, on the other hand, does not appeal to a specific category or situation, and can be open to ideas that will benefit all kinds of society. One day he may be defending animal rights, the next he may be defending people. I can say that those who operate for a subject may be more commercially concerned.*

Considering the example given by Gizem, one of the participants, it is seen that one of the common features of consumption-wide societies is to consume ideas. Talking about the fact that entrepreneurship ideas and projects that stand out among the younger generation will fade over time, the participant mentions that this is a trend and a fad that comes and goes and that the effect of social responsibility and social entrepreneurship activities can be observed if they are continuous.

*-Gizem: In order to gain status and prestige, it is important for both doing charity work and getting a good place in the society. Social responsibility projects have become a trend in our country at the moment, and this situation is also reflected in the youth. The attention of young people is also gathered to a situation, then it becomes a trend, and this is how entrepreneurship is now. Social entrepreneurship is not as a trend. I think it is a necessary condition, something needed. There are companies that donate a certain part of their income to charities by increasing their profits.*

One of the participants, Altan, stated that within the example he gave on a local basis, there were also educational activities as social entrepreneurship. The cases of building a school and a hospital connected to a foundation are presented as examples of social entrepreneurship.

*-Altan: There is even a social enterprise for education. We can say that our school was actually founded by a social entrepreneur. It was established under the name of a foundation. This foundation did not only provide universities and schools, but also provided aid and studies for many issues. In this sense, it cannot be shown in a single category. I think we read that this foundation and person is a social entrepreneur because he founded our hospital. Within the scope of this foundation, many institutions such as kindergartens, high schools and universities are located throughout the province.*

When asked about the people's realization of social entrepreneurship activities in the close circle of the participants, it was concluded that examples of this were not observed in their close circles.



It is seen that it is difficult to find examples of this subject in society. However, only one participant gave the following anecdote on the subject..

*-Onore: I have a friend who is doing a PhD in the environment and is trying to build a tool for air filtration. In their country, mining is done a lot and air pollution is related to this. He was born in Cameroon where people live in bad weather. He has knowledge in chemistry and various fields, he is doing his doctorate in the field of environment in France. He wants to establish a facility about it.*

#### *Basic Characteristics and Educational Status of Social Entrepreneurs*

When the personality traits of social entrepreneurs are considered, the general view is that they should be assertive, have responsibility since childhood, be conscientious, and receive their education in this direction. The characteristics stated by the participants are close to each other. It is emphasized that the social entrepreneur should have leadership characteristics.

*- Perçem: I think that a person who will have these characteristics will show himself even from primary school. It certainly has certain features. If he can think widely, he simply does not perceive people and events as they seem, with plain logic. I think he is in a constantly questioning nature. I think it started from primary school and consisted of people who raised their hands first, put themselves first, and took responsibility. I think that the first to express his opinion is the person who does not keep silent in the face of injustice and opposes it. I don't think this situation has a certain age. Anyone from the age of six to sixty can show if they have these social entrepreneurial traits. While walking on the road, a person who spits his gum on the ground should be warned about the harm it causes, say that it is harmful to the environment, and be able to react. A person sitting quietly in a corner cannot express his opinion in this way. This should be in that person's life.*



Within the scope of the example given by one of the participants, Miraç, she states that they take part in social responsibility projects in line with the income status of the people and that they contribute to the society at this level.

*-Miraç: One of the social media phenomena donated a significant portion of the video revenues he received to the families of the martyrs and their children, and he also announced this. In general terms, he both talks about the benefit of this situation and improves his image by glorifying himself with what he does. When we look at his personality traits, I observe that he is assertive and has good human relations, and has a more emotional structure than he seems.*

Participants especially share the examples of social entrepreneurship they see in their environment and on social media. With these aspects, it appears that they can distinguish these projects and initiatives from others.

*-Gizem: They become specific people and they create institutions for stray animals, for example. Although no one knows the person who created the institution, money is sent to them through certain channels and sites. They create a cycle by covering the fees sent as 5 TL and 10 TL as food and shelter for stray animals. I think this is an example of social entrepreneurship. They*



*also use social media, and act on sites where young people are frequent. The most important characteristics of these people can be said to be assertive, courageous, and taking risks without thinking about the end*

### *Social Entrepreneurship in Career Planning*

Considering the career thoughts of the participants, it would be correct to say that they did not act in a planned manner for the future; they could not foresee this, and they did not think about their social entrepreneurship situation. When social entrepreneurship situations are considered, the main reason people do not include it in their career plans is that they do not know how to earn economic income from this situation and tend to classic career situations. Participants perceive social entrepreneurship as a social responsibility project alongside their work, rather than treating them as the main job in their career processes. The findings stated as a result of the interviews are in this direction.

*- Altan: When we were little, nobody told us to be social entrepreneurs. We were not encouraged or trained to support social responsibility projects, even at school. Frankly, I don't think it could be me, I think it should be basically an education, starting from childhood. People who aim for social entrepreneurship by studying business are rare, for this there should be more different departments and they should be directed to these from the basics.*

*Only one of the participants stated that he had thought about this career planning before. The fact that the same participant has a relative who bases his/her social entrepreneurship status in career planning in his/her immediate environment ensures that he/she also looks at this situation warmly. Social interaction is considered important when planning a career and has been the determining factor.*

*-Onore: I thought of planning such a career. I come from Rwanda and people there don't have financial means, but they have ideas. When I get back there, I would like to work as an investor for people with ideas. It is beneficial in this sense that their ideas are formed by developing ideas in the society. In this way, I can improve myself. It should consist of people who love the society. While an entrepreneur goes to a place where there is an opportunity and realizes his idea there, the social entrepreneur carries out his work in the region he loves and is connected to. He wants to influence society.*

The view that the participants must have a certain income to become a social entrepreneur is dominant on the group. Although the discourses are in this direction, the opinions on the question "Is financial resources necessary?" were gathered about the importance of moral support.

*-Umut: Even if it does not help financially, it can also be in a position that provides moral support, leadership and awareness in a problematic and open area of society. I don't just think in terms of money. Raising people's awareness can also be called social entrepreneurship.*

While the participants have an abstaining attitude about entrepreneurship, they have just mastered the concept of social entrepreneurship. Although their research on this subject may



lead them to look more warmly in the future, there is a prevailing opinion that social entrepreneurship should be integrated into education from childhood.

Although social entrepreneurship is defined as a derivative of entrepreneurship that aims to make social change, it is very different from general entrepreneurship that focuses on creating new value and making a profit. Social entrepreneurship has played an active role in working principles for social progress in all areas of human life, such as art, culture, technology, and much more. In this context, social entrepreneurship is an idea sensitive to social issues that affect the entrepreneurial environment that affects the economic progress of the nation entrepreneurs, especially those who have received education and training, have a vital role in the country's economy. Therefore, it is important to teach entrepreneurship at all educational levels and that the university also creates a reliable entrepreneur. Considering the level of interest of social entrepreneurs in today's society, many educational institutions have started to encourage more students to participate in social entrepreneurship initiatives, that is, to participate in social entrepreneurial behavior. Adopting entrepreneurship in university life has become a vital issue among entrepreneurship researchers. The university is an institution where students move on to the next stage of their working life, and students decide where and how they will start their working life after graduation. The state should start to support entrepreneurship, and at the same time, encouraging and supporting university students to start their own businesses after graduation will increase students' awareness of social entrepreneurship.

## CONCLUSION

As a result, in line with the purpose of this research, when the students' views, perceptions, and perspectives on social entrepreneurship are examined with the information they have acquired within the scope of the 'Entrepreneurship' course offered as an elective course to undergraduate students at universities, it is seen that students receive financial support in their career planning and can apply for funds supported by entrepreneurs. It is seen that the students are unfamiliar with this concept, because they are included in this course to get a certificate, only the social entrepreneurship situation mentioned in the course is not known in the future or before because it is not in the educational environments and curricula. From a different perspective, it has been stated that the concept of social entrepreneurship is associated with social responsibility and that businesses can engage in social entrepreneurship for strategic purposes in line with their own interests. In addition, it was emphasized that the implementation of the ideas put forward to make a difference facilitates the lives of individuals and societies, and that all kinds of help create awareness. On the other hand, some of the participants mentioned that the entrepreneurial ideas and projects that stand out among the younger generation will lose their impact over time, that this is a trend and a passing enthusiasm, so that the impact of social responsibility and social entrepreneurship activities can be observed if they are continuous. In addition, it has been observed that the participants see and perceive social entrepreneurship as a social responsibility project alongside their own work, instead of considering social entrepreneurship as their main job in their career processes.

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