

Current Trends in Social Entrepreneurship Education on Massive Open Online Courses platforms

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Abstract. This paper examines current trends in social entrepreneurship education (SEE) as delivered through Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platforms in North America. The analysis identifies dominant themes in course content as well as the teaching methods employed. The most frequently addressed topics include impact measurement, innovation processes, resource acquisition, scaling, and sustainability. All of the courses analyzed incorporate video lectures and assigned readings, with all but one integrating detailed case studies. Guest lectures and structured discussion prompts emerge as the next most frequently employed teaching methods. A comparative assessment with face-to-face SEE courses highlights the need for the development of instructor-led online formats that incorporate more complex assignments subject to expert evaluation. By presenting the range of pedagogical tools used across MOOCs to address similar themes, this study provides valuable insights for educators seeking to update or redesign both face-to-face and online SEE curricula.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship Education, Massive Open Online Courses, Teaching Methods, MOOCs

1 Introduction

Social entrepreneurship integrates entrepreneurial processes with the pursuit of a social mission. It encompasses enterprises whose primary objective is the sustainable reduction of exclusion, marginalization, or the suffering of specific social groups [1]. The European Union distinguishes between two types of social enterprises [2]: those that provide social services or goods to vulnerable populations, and those that foster social and professional integration through the employment of disadvantaged individuals. In essence, such enterprises incorporate into market activities individuals who might otherwise remain excluded from production and/or consumption due to reduced productivity, prejudice, low purchasing power, or related constraints [3].

In response to the growing prominence of social enterprises, universities have increasingly developed courses designed to cultivate the competencies necessary for launching and successfully managing social ventures. The subsequent chapter provides a concise literature review on social entrepreneurship education (SEE), with particular emphasis on teaching methods and the competencies such education seeks to foster. Drawing on this review, the authors formulated the research questions guiding the study. The third section outlines the methodological framework, followed by data

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analysis in the fourth section, while the fifth section presents the discussion and conclusions.

2 Theoretical background

The first formal course on social entrepreneurship was introduced by Gregory Dees at Harvard University in the mid-1990s. Soon thereafter, other leading U.S. universities incorporated social entrepreneurship into their curricula, further legitimizing the field within higher education [4], [5]. The concept quickly diffused to Europe, where universities in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and Italy were among the early adopters [4], [5]. Empirical research has shown that students exposed to social entrepreneurship education (SEE) perceive social entrepreneurship as both more desirable and more feasible than their counterparts who lack such exposure [6].

Perić and Delić [7] argued that the integration of social entrepreneurship education represents an integral dimension of universities' broader social responsibility. Croatian higher education institutions responded gradually by embedding the topic into existing entrepreneurship courses [8]. A notable milestone was the introduction of the elective course Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at VERN Polytechnic in 2012 [9]. At present, only one mandatory SEE course exists in Croatia: it is offered within the undergraduate program Economics of Entrepreneurship at the Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb [10], [11]. Comparative research between Croatia and the United States indicates that Croatian SEE offerings remain less focused on innovation and scaling social enterprises, while also providing fewer opportunities for experiential projects with service-learning components [12]. Furthermore, significant scope for improvement persists in developing student competencies in sales and financial management.

Technological advancements have simultaneously reshaped the higher education sector by enabling the widespread delivery of courses online, independent of students' geographic location. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) experienced particularly rapid expansion between 2017 and 2021, more than doubling in size during this period, although growth has since decelerated. The online learning platform market is projected to generate USD 60.25 billion in revenue by 2025, with an expected annual growth rate of 5.81% from 2025 to 2029 [13]. MOOCs platforms themselves may be conceptualized as social enterprises, as they create social value by mitigating inequalities in access to educational resources through free or low-cost online offerings available globally [14].

Paunescu and Vidović [15] examined the availability of SEE within MOOCs platforms. Coursera emerged as the most significant provider, with content developed by 11 universities. The University of Pennsylvania was the most active contributor, followed by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, ESSEC Business School, Copenhagen Business School, and the University of Colorado Boulder. Beyond supporting the creation of new social enterprises, MOOCs-based SEE contributes to the cultivation of sustainability-oriented and socially entrepreneurial mindsets among learners across the public, private, and civil society sectors [16].

The competencies required to successfully establish and manage a social venture, as articulated by practitioners, include problem-solving, effective team building, financial management, leadership and capacity development, stakeholder communication, interpersonal skills, marketing and sales, strategic management, outcome measurement, and the ability to foster collaborative relationships [17]. Brock and Steiner [4] identified recurrent thematic areas in SEE curricula, including social problems and needs, innovation, scaling social enterprises, resource mobilization, opportunity recognition, sustainable business outcomes, and outcome measurement. To investigate whether MOOCs-based SEE continues to emphasize these themes more than a decade later, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: What topics dominate social entrepreneurship education on MOOCs platforms?

Prior research has highlighted that students are more effective in developing social ventures when intrinsically motivated, particularly through emotional attachment to a social entrepreneurial idea [18], [19]. Consequently, SEE pedagogies should aim to strengthen compassionate love, considered the most distinctive trait of individuals motivated to engage in social entrepreneurship [20]. Brock and Steiner [4] also documented a wide range of teaching methods in SEE, including lectures, venture analysis, discussions, case studies, practical projects, service learning, consulting, business plan development, as well as less common approaches such as guest lectures, volunteering, internships, and direct involvement in social entrepreneurial ventures. To determine the extent to which these methods are employed in MOOCs-based SEE, the following research question is formulated:

RQ2: Which teaching methods are most commonly employed in social entrepreneurship education on MOOCs platforms?

3 Methodology

This study employs a desk research approach to collect qualitative data on the availability of social entrepreneurship education through MOOCs platforms. The initial step in identifying courses whose curricula predominantly address social entrepreneurship involved determining which MOOCs platforms to include in the analysis. While numerous online articles compile lists of available platforms, this study drew upon *The Massive List of MOOC Platforms Around the World in 2025* [21], as it represents the most recent and comprehensive source, categorizing platforms by global region. Subsequently, all North American MOOCs platforms listed in Table 1 were systematically searched using the keywords “social entrepreneurship”, “social entrepreneur”, and “social enterprise”. The resulting data were manually organized in an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate the identification of patterns in course content and teaching methods. The analysis, therefore, relies on the accuracy and completeness of the information publicly available on the MOOCs platforms.

Table 1. MOOCs platforms.

Region	MOOCs platform/Country
North America	Coursera/the United States
	edX/the United States
	Udacity/the United States
	Canvas Network/the United States
	Kadenze/the United States
	Complexity Explorer/the United States
	MéxicoX / Mexico - nula
Europe	FutureLearn/the United Kingdom
	France Université Numérique (FUN) / France
	EduOpen / Italy
	Federica Web Learning / Italy
	European Multiple MOOC Aggregator (EMMA) / Europe
	OpenHPI / Germany
	MOOC.fi / Finland
	Prometheus / Ukraine - 2
Asia (excluding China)	Open Education (openedu.ru) / Russia
	SWAYAM / India
	NPTEL / India
	JMOOC / Japan
	gacco / Japan
	OpenLearning / Japan
	K-MOOC / Korea
	ThaiMOOC / Thailand
	Edraak (Arabic) / Jordan
	Campus-II / Israel
China	UTas / Australia
	XuetangX / China
	Chinese University MOOC / China
	Zhihuishu / China
	Xue Yin Online / China
	Open Education (openedu.tw) / Taiwan
	eWant — education you want / Taiwan
	A massive list of all Chinese language MOOC platforms

4 Results

Of the seven North American MOOCs platforms reviewed, only two—Coursera and edX—offer courses in social entrepreneurship. Each platform currently provides six SEE courses.

On Coursera, two of the identified courses are designed as stand-alone offerings. Three additional courses may also be taken individually, although they form part of a broader specialization entitled *Social Entrepreneurship*, which delivers a more comprehensive curriculum in the field. The final course, *Social Entrepreneurship*, is embedded within the wider specialization *Business Strategies for a Better World*, which extends beyond social entrepreneurship to include other business-related topics.

The six courses available on edX are all structured as stand-alone offerings. Notably, two of these are archived, meaning that while students can still access the teaching materials, they are unable to obtain certification. An overview of the identified courses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. SEE courses on MOOCs platforms.

Platform	Course title	University
Coursera	Creating Change through Social Entrepreneurship	Yale University, USA
Coursera	Social Entrepreneurship	University of Pennsylvania, USA
Coursera	Identifying Social Entrepreneurship Opportunities	Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Coursera	Social Business Model and Planning for Social Innovation	Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Coursera	Unleashing the Impact of your Social Enterprise	Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Coursera	Social Impact Strategy: Tools for Entrepreneurs and Innovators	University of Pennsylvania, USA
edX	Social Entrepreneurship and Systems Change	Harvard University, USA
edX	Disciplined Approach to Social Entrepreneurship	Curtin University, Australia
edX	Social Entrepreneurship – von der Idee zur Umsetzung	Social Entrepreneurship Akademie, Germany
edX	Enabling Entrepreneurs to Shape a Better World	Social Entrepreneurship Akademie, Germany
edX	Social Franchising	Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics, Portugal
edX	Business and Impact Planning for Social Enterprises	Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of SEE courses by university. Among the institutions represented on the analyzed MOOCs platforms, four are based in the United States, three in the European Union, and one in Australia.

With respect to language, all but one of the courses are delivered in English; the exception is a course offered in German. The extent of accessibility for non-English speakers varies considerably, ranging from a course with no alternative language options to three courses that provide translation into as many as 24 languages.

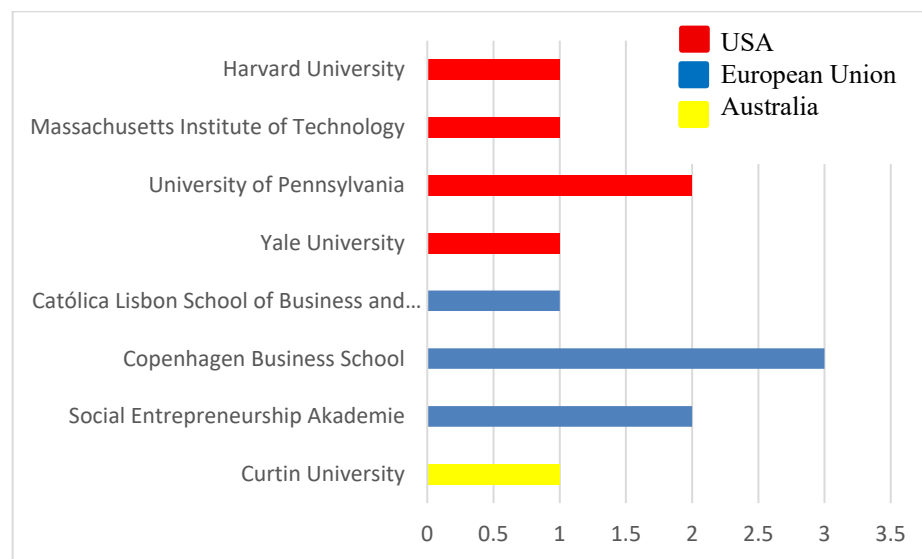


Fig. 1. Number of SEE courses on MOOCs platforms by university.

On the edX platform, enrollment data were available for only one course, which recorded 5,297 students. By contrast, the Coursera courses achieved substantially higher enrollment figures, ranging from 8,823 to 55,493 students. Enrollment numbers are, however, strongly influenced by the time of course creation and therefore cannot be regarded as a direct indicator of course quality.

Nevertheless, two courses stand out in terms of participation. The course *Social Impact Strategy: Tools for Entrepreneurs and Innovators*, offered by the University of Pennsylvania (USA), has enrolled 55,493 students to date, representing the highest figure observed. The second most popular course, *Identifying Social Entrepreneurship Opportunities*, developed by Copenhagen Business School (Denmark), has attracted 32,978 students to date.

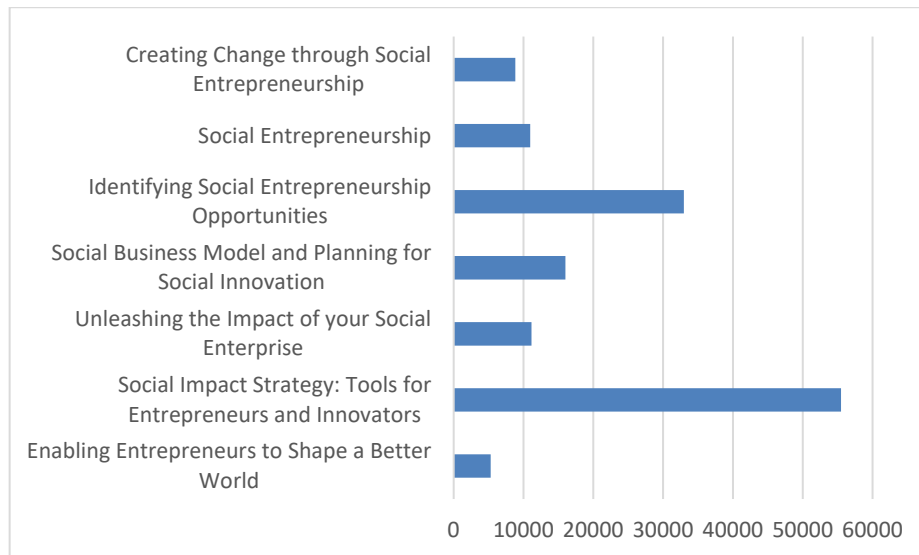


Fig. 2. Total number of enrolled students (data available for seven courses).

With the exception of one course that specifies prior experience as a prerequisite, all of the analyzed offerings are designed at the beginner level. In terms of workload, the courses vary considerably, ranging from three to forty hours of study time, thereby providing options suitable for learners with different preferences. All currently available certificate-granting courses operate on a flexible schedule. Only one course was instructor-paced, though it is now archived and no longer actively facilitated.

The dominant thematic areas within SEE courses on MOOCs platforms are presented in Figure 1. The most frequently addressed topics include outcome measurement, innovation processes, resource acquisition, scaling, and sustainability. A variety of approaches to outcome measurement are introduced, such as Social Return on Investment (SROI), balanced scorecards, use-case diagrams, theory of change, performance criteria frameworks, and the IOOI (input–output–outcome–impact) model. Innovation is most commonly addressed through user-driven design, emphasizing an understanding of beneficiaries. To cultivate empathy, several courses employ tools such as empathy maps, mind maps, and stakeholder maps, while others explore prototyping, problem trees, and pivoting strategies.

Resource acquisition is primarily examined in three dimensions: (1) funding opportunities for social enterprises, including impact investing and crowdfunding; (2) stakeholder collaboration; and (3) human resource strategies, particularly the recruitment of individuals aligned with the organization’s mission and the formation of effective teams. One course, for example, draws upon Belbin’s team role framework.

Scaling is conceptualized as both organizational growth and partnership development, while sustainability is framed through the construction of durable business models. Under this theme, courses introduce tools such as the business model

spectrum, revenue and distribution models specific to social enterprises, competitive analysis, positioning assessments, the logic model, the value proposition canvas, and the business model canvas. One course further expands this toolkit with process mapping, stakeholder mapping, root cause analysis, and system boundary definition.

Approximately half of the courses also address opportunity evaluation, communication strategies, business plan development, and the legal structures of social enterprises. Opportunity evaluation typically involves data collection and problem analysis, incorporating demographic, regional, and infrastructural factors. Some courses distinguish between *impact opportunities* and *market opportunities*. Communication-related content includes pitching, storytelling, communication planning, and the formulation of impact opportunity statements.

A number of additional topics appear more sporadically across the curricula. For instance, several courses provide a broad overview of current social needs, highlight the role of failure in entrepreneurial learning, or address market analysis in greater depth. Others emphasize management techniques, student self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses, or knowledge of the broader social entrepreneurship ecosystem. One course specifically focuses on intellectual property.

Overall, the courses offered on Coursera and edX are largely aligned in their coverage of key topics. Minor differences emerge, however, with edX courses tending to place stronger emphasis on sustainability, while Coursera courses devote comparatively greater attention to the development of business plans.

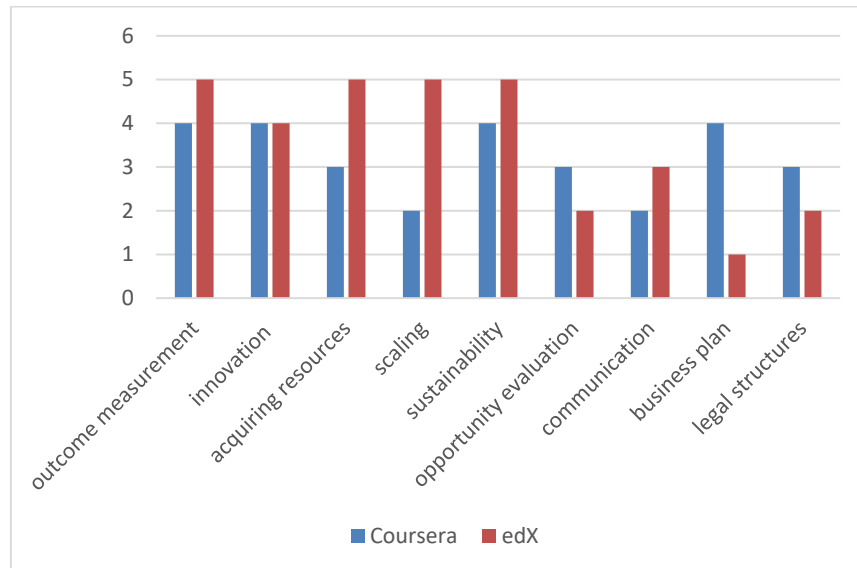


Fig. 1. Topics covered in SEE courses on MOOCs platforms.

Figure 2 presents a comparison of the topics addressed in SEE courses developed in the United States and the European Union. Courses originating in the U.S. place comparatively greater emphasis on outcome measurement and sustainability.

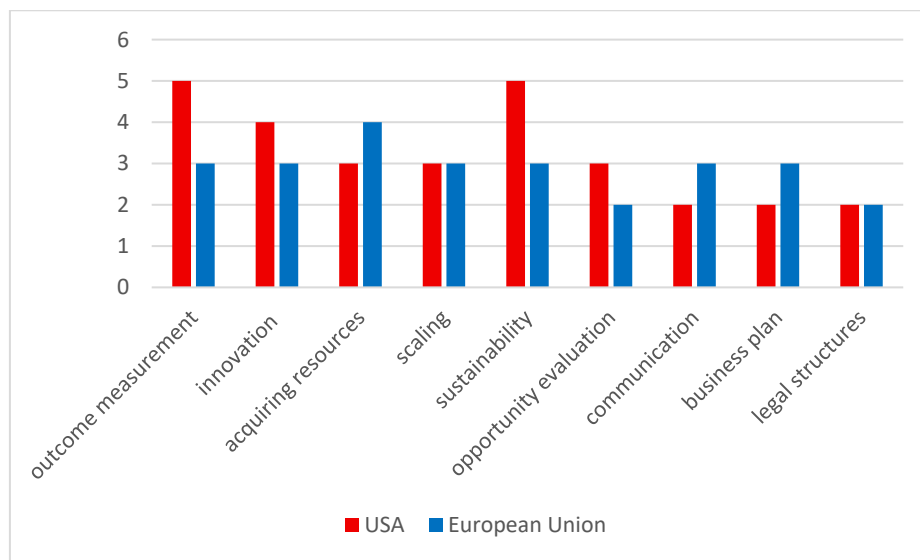


Fig. 2. Topics covered in SEE courses developed in the USA and the European Union (the course developed in Australia is not included here).

Figure 3 summarizes the teaching methods employed across the analyzed SEE courses. All courses incorporate video lectures and assigned readings, while all but one make extensive use of detailed case studies. Guest lectures represent the next most frequently adopted instructional method, followed by discussion prompts, which were identified in seven courses. However, the effectiveness of these prompts appears limited, as they typically elicit individual student statements without fostering substantive peer-to-peer interaction.

To assess students' knowledge and competencies, seven courses employ quizzes, and an equal number utilize practical assignments, three of which are evaluated through peer review. Overall, the pedagogical approaches do not differ substantially between the two platforms. A minor distinction can nevertheless be observed: edX courses make more frequent use of quizzes compared to those hosted on Coursera.

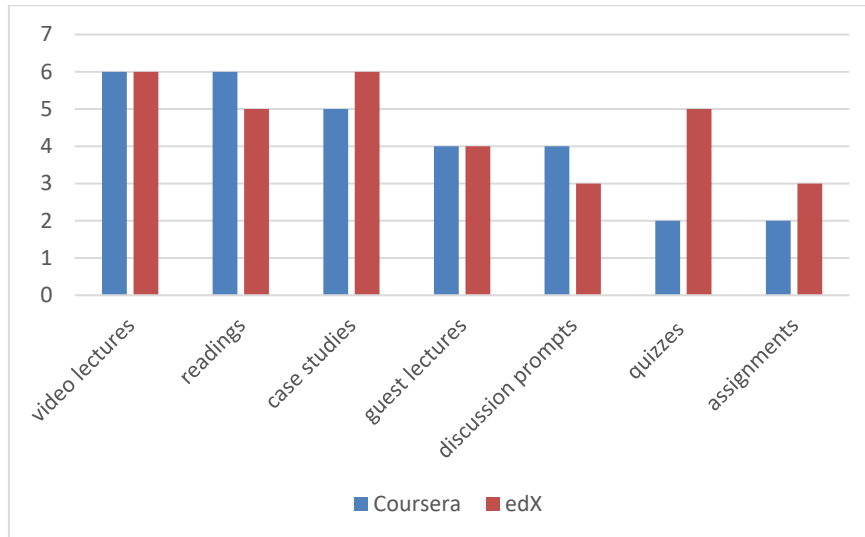


Fig. 3. Teaching methods used in SEE courses on MOOCs platforms.

Figure 4 presents a comparison of teaching methods employed in SEE courses developed in the United States and the European Union. Courses originating in the European Union make comparatively greater use of guest lectures than those developed in the United States.

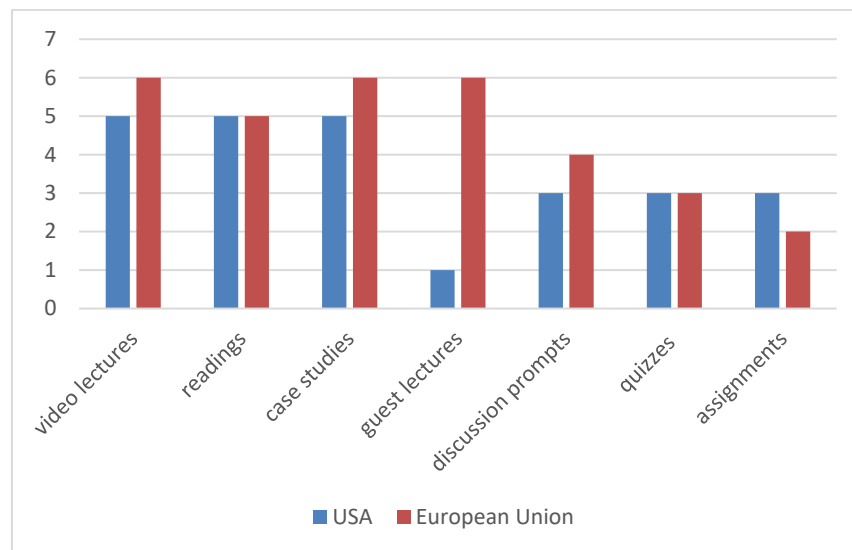


Fig. 4. Teaching methods used in SEE courses developed in the USA and the European Union (the course developed in Australia is not included here).

5 Conclusion

Individuals interested in social entrepreneurship may benefit considerably from introductory-level courses available on Coursera and edX. A primary limitation, however, concerns the accessibility of these courses in multiple languages, which varies substantially across providers. In terms of content, MOOCs-based SEE generally addresses the same thematic areas as traditional face-to-face university courses. Nevertheless, their shorter duration restricts opportunities for more in-depth engagement with contemporary social problems and needs.

Self-paced online education offers the advantage of continuous accessibility, yet it remains limited compared to instructor-led formats due to its reliance on less interactive teaching methods. In particular, the absence of human instructors precludes the use of pedagogical approaches such as service learning, volunteering, and internships within social enterprises. As a result, the analyzed MOOCs provide condensed, highly focused content delivered within a relatively short timeframe. While low cost and flexible scheduling represent clear advantages, interactive learning opportunities are underutilized because they require greater instructor involvement and consequently increase course expenses. Some courses attempt to address this gap through peer evaluation, though its effectiveness remains debatable.

As previously noted, discussion prompts rarely result in meaningful interaction, as students tend to share individual opinions without responding to their peers. Two potential improvements are proposed. First, online discussion forums could be organized by economic sectors and target groups, allowing students with similar interests—such as supporting homeless populations—to connect with peers who have completed the course, review their reflections, learn from them and potentially initiate collaborations. Second, courses could incorporate a service-learning component whereby students volunteer within their chosen sector of interest and subsequently share their reflections with peers. Such measures would not significantly increase instructor workload, while enhancing experiential and collaborative learning. By contrast, embedding group projects may be less feasible, given the self-paced nature of MOOCs and the heterogeneous levels of student motivation.

Although nearly all analyzed courses are positioned at the beginner level, there is a clear absence of instructor-led formats capable of providing tailored guidance to teams developing social ventures. While such courses would inevitably be more resource-intensive, they would better facilitate the acquisition and application of entrepreneurial skills rather than focusing solely on theoretical knowledge.

Among the less frequently addressed topics, the role of failure warrants particular attention. It is argued that every entrepreneurship curriculum should explicitly address entrepreneurial failure, as it constitutes an inherent and often recurring element of entrepreneurial practice.

Finally, the analyzed courses on North American MOOCs platforms employ different practical tools to address similar topics in social entrepreneurship. Future research should extend this analysis by comparing SEE on platforms belonging to

diverse geographical regions to identify similarities, differences, and potential best practices.

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