

Examination of Students' Social Entrepreneurial an Observational Test

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Abstract—This paper examines the disparity between male and female Syrian university students in enhancing intellectual awareness and developing entrepreneurial skills in the charitable sector. It explores how these influential groups can contribute to activating the roles of institutions and individuals in serving society humanely. The study's hypotheses were based on variables such as entrepreneurial intentions, self-efficacy, perceived social support, moral obligation, and empathy. Results support the existence of gender differences among private university students. Findings reveal that many Syrians have the potential and strong desire to become social entrepreneurs despite facing significant economic and social challenges. The study also underscores the urgent need for systematic education for those addressing social issues in Syria. It recommends that Syrian educational institutions incorporate courses on social entrepreneurship, possibly through relevant elective courses.

Keywords—Empathy, Entrepreneurial intentions, Moral obligation, Self-efficacy, Social entrepreneurship programs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Our research examines the social entrepreneurial intentions (SEIs) of Syrian private and state university students, noting that social exchange ventures are particularly significant for women and that younger individuals are more influenced by social and business ventures (Maziriri et al., 2024). No specialized social entrepreneurship courses are offered in Syrian universities, highlighting a need for such education to develop future social entrepreneurs. In the Middle East, data on social entrepreneurship programs (SEPs) are limited, with no dedicated teaching centers or ongoing research.

Our objective is to explore SEP development in Syria, focusing on SEI among young Syrians, and to assess whether there are suitable human resources for future social ventures. We aim to evaluate the feasibility of integrating social entrepreneurship courses into university curricula, based on data from approximately 300 Syrian university students. Our research also addresses the broad and debated definitions of SEP, which includes work integration, poverty reduction, and environmental protection (Bielefeld, 2009; Henderson and Robertson, 2000; Hockerts, 2017; Issa et al., 2023).

Kaya (2024) focused on the legal and administrative challenges faced by Syrian small, medium, and micro-enterprises in Turkey, established by Syrian refugee entrepreneurs. The

study identified significant gaps in auditing, monitoring, and analyzing the negative impacts on these businesses. In the same context, Refai et al. (2024) highlighted the challenges faced by small and medium-sized business owners in northern England and their impact on Syrian entrepreneurs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on entrepreneurial intentions (EIs) is vast. Liñán and Fayolle (2015) "Systematic Literature Review on Entrepreneurial Intentions" offers a comprehensive overview, analyzing 409 EI-related papers published between 2004 and 2013. Liñán's work identifies five primary areas of specialization, including SEP, and categorizes 25 specific themes within these areas, offering a detailed picture of EI research subfields. The foundational contributions of Shapero and Sokol, 1982, are acknowledged as pivotal in the development of EI literature. In the second part of our discussion, we revisit Shapero's EI model, focusing on the methodology of our study, which models SEI. It is essential to define "social entrepreneurship" at the outset of our discussion (Massoudi et al., 2023; Sawadi and Al-Salami, 2015).

Hockerts (2017) characterizes SEP as encompassing diverse domains, from work integration and poverty reduction to

environmental resource protection. Due to the broad scope of the field, definitions and terminology remain contested. Bielefeld (2009) highlights this ambiguity, noting that the diversity of actors and contexts has played a significant role in the recent increase in interest in social enterprises and social entrepreneurship. Social enterprises have emerged as a distinct area within general entrepreneurship studies, quickly evolving into an independent field of research and practice (Jami et al., 2023).

SEP drives social change, adapting business principles. It fosters social transformation. Demand rises for innovators driving economic and social development (Rwehumbiza and Hyun, 2024). This paper examines SEP and SE who actualize them. As a relatively new field within economics and business studies, SEP remains largely unexplored in many countries, including Syria.

SEPs have emerged as a distinct specialization in the field of general entrepreneurship studies, quickly evolving into an independent domain of applied research (Rwehumbiza and Hyun, 2024). Both commercial and social entrepreneurial activities create opportunities for advancement (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010).

Maziriri et al. (2024) found that leadership models in social entrepreneurship enhance self-efficacy, intention, and action, with moral obligation as a significant factor. Their study of 261 students in Eastern Cape, South Africa, showed a strong link between intention and action, moderated by moral obligation, and mediated by self-efficacy.

Similarly, Satar (2024) examined the impact of inspiring role models, social entrepreneurs' education, and social entrepreneurs' compassion on nascent SE behavior in Saudi Arabia, surveying 136 emerging social entrepreneurs. The study finds information risk management (IRM) exposure which impacts nascent SE behavior, SE compassion predicts it, and SE education indirectly affects it through SE compassion but has no direct effect. SE compassion does not mediate IRM's impact. The study provides insights and a framework for further SE behavior research (Jami and Agha, 2022; Massoudi and Birdawod, 2023).

In 2024, Feroz found that educational, structural, and relational support, along with self-efficacy, positively influence entrepreneurial attitudes among university graduates in Southern Punjab, highlighting the need for Pakistani institutions to redesign curricula to promote entrepreneurship (Feroz, 2024). Rwehumbiza and Hyun (2024) identified personal experiences and backgrounds as key motivators for SEs in Tanzania, introducing a new motivational model and proposing governance innovations.

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap on SEP in Syria by examining young Syrians' SEI and the availability of suitable human resources. It seeks to contribute to predictive models of social entrepreneur success and assess the feasibility of offering related courses at Syrian universities.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Syrian SMEs, rooted in historical commerce, notably contribute to the economy. Abdelrahim and Abdelrahim (2007) state that by the early 2000s, the government aimed to create 200,000 jobs yearly, with only 90,000 in the public sector.

The International Labour Organization reports that 88% of workers were employed by SMEs (Alsheikhly, 2009). Initial hindrances from the centralized economy were addressed with mid-1990s decentralization, supporting small investors.

Abdelrahim and Abdelrahim (2007) post-2000 SME analysis in Syria underscores potential opportunities for future social entrepreneurs. Damascus' registered SMEs, including various service sectors, formed the study's sample. However, some industries such as travel and tourism are inactive due to the current political climate. SMEs require minimal investment, with human resources being key (Al-Salami et al., 2019). Just 16.7% prioritize regular staff training, whereas 83.3% focus on managerial staff. Individuals under 41 own 66.7% of businesses.

Businesses had a maximum of 25 workers, and 81.5% of them had 15 workers or fewer. Companies with headquarters in Damascus were privately held by their management, who made all of the decisions. Furthermore, 88.5% of enterprises depended on self-financing to fund their operations instead of loans and debt (Abdelrahim and Abdelrahim, 2007).

The turbulent state of the Syrian economy has spurred the development of social entrepreneurship programs (SEPs), which often thrive during economic recessions. During stable economic periods, large companies attract labor with higher salaries, reducing small business establishment and the role of SEP. However, recessions increase unemployment, prompting individuals to start their ventures (Kashina and Utkina, 2015; Massoudi et al., 2024).

The non-profit sector compensates for public good shortages during market failures, filling the gap of government failure (Kugel and Mercado, 2024; Weisbrod, 1988). Similar events occurred in the United States during economic recessions (Bielefeld, 2009). In Syria, involving non-profit organizations in providing essential services is crucial (Al-Salami and Abdalla, 2022). The objectives of SEPs include providing unavailable goods and services, enhancing skills, creating job opportunities, supporting social integration, alleviating poverty, and offering health-care services (Rwehumbiza and Hyun, 2024; Saadi et al., 2023).

The gender differences, Syria continues to have a highly gender-segregated labor market, with cultural constraints defining what constitutes "relevant" work for men and women. The majority of social orientations of women are associated with strong gender stereotypes that go counter to modern women's desires for self-fulfillment (Cañas-Martinez, 2024).

Such nations view entrepreneurship and "for-profit" enterprises as "man's" domains. From this vantage point, SEP is a compromised means for women to realize who they are outside of the family. Kashina and Utkina (2015) think that "it is women with their emotional orientation to the client, care, and the responsible relation get advantage before man in realization of the main objectives of social business."

IV. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature, five hypotheses were formulated. These hypotheses were empirically tested among Syrian students of both genders

to examine the relationships between the variables under investigation, as delineated in the proposed research model. Fig. 1 shows the recommended research model.

V. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Based on the aforementioned research model (Fig. 1), the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant ($\alpha = 0.05$) difference between male and female students' responses to independent variables (empathy).

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) between state and private university students' responses for variables (moral obligation).

Hypothesis 3: Regarding the independent variable (self-efficacy), there is a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the responses of students.

Hypothesis 4: There is a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) between students' responses for the independent variable (perceived social support) who have different specializations.

Hypothesis 5: There is a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) between students' responses for independent variables (EIs) who have different specializations.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Let us briefly summarize the theoretical foundation of EIs modeling before delving into the details of our model. Liñán notes that "an explosion of research using EI model as a framework" occurred in the early 1990s in his review of the literature on entrepreneurship (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015). Most EI models are compatible and similar, and they fall into two primary categories:

First, originating from social psychology with the intention of examining behaviors in general, illuminating the cognitive process that links attitudes and beliefs to productive action, this approach's most significant theoretical foundation is found in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) from

1991 (Ajzen, 1991), which views intentions as "effective and reliable predictors of behavior."

Shapero's Entrepreneurial Event (EE) model (Shapero and Sokol, 1982) is prominent among entrepreneurship models, considering genetic traits such as risk-taking ability, achievement drive, locus of control, and self-confidence. These models acknowledge various environmental influences. The context has an impact on entrepreneurship as well. Contextual and genetic factors must be taken into account concurrently and be treated as variables in the EI model (Issa and Al-Salami, 2023).

According to Shapero's EE model, the desire to act on opportunity and the perception of desirability and feasibility are what lead someone to decide to launch a firm. "Opportunity" implies that the capacity to launch a firm comes before the inclination to take action. How much a person believes they are personally capable of launching a firm is known as "perceived feasibility." Shapero's "perceived desirability" and Ajzen-Fishbein's "social norms and attitudes" align. "Perceived behavioral control" was covered by Ajzen's "Propensity to act" variable.

Turker and Selcuk (2009) introduced an entrepreneurial support model tested on 300 Turkish students, highlighting the significance of structural and educational support over relational support in shaping youth emotional intelligence (EI). Ngugi et al. (2012) applied Shapero's model to Kenyan university students' entrepreneurial tendencies. The person-entrepreneurship fit model by Mair and Noboa (2006) explores factors influencing SEI, building upon Shapero's EE model and Ajzen's TPB. Mair and Noboa (2006) identified four personality traits as primary predictors of SEI.

Self-efficacy represents internal behavior control; moral judgment reflects societal norms; empathy mirrors attitudes toward behavior; perceived social support symbolizes external behavioral control. The four primary variables of the model are the measures of the traits mentioned above. The average response to three to four questions (or questionnaire items) determined the value of each variable.

Hockerts (2017) integrated prior involvement with social organizations into the SEI model, analyzing 2790 responses based on age, minority status, gender, and nationality. Our study empirically tests Mair and Noboa's model in the Syrian context, using their variables and hypotheses. Approximately 150 random observations were collected from students at Syrian universities in the areas of Damascus city and Daraa governorate.

A 24-item questionnaire, resembling Hockerts' work, was administered, initially in English but later in both English and Arabic. Only 116 of the 150 questionnaires were deemed valid, with responses evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. The 24 items in the questionnaire set were split into five subsets that represented the personal attributes of the five individuals.

The capacity to understand another person's feelings or the propensity to feel something when faced with another person's mental and emotional state is known as empathy (Miller et al., 2012; Saeed, 2024). Ajzen's TPB (Kautonen et al., 2015) starts with empathy, representing a person's attitude toward SEP. Moral obligation results from perceived

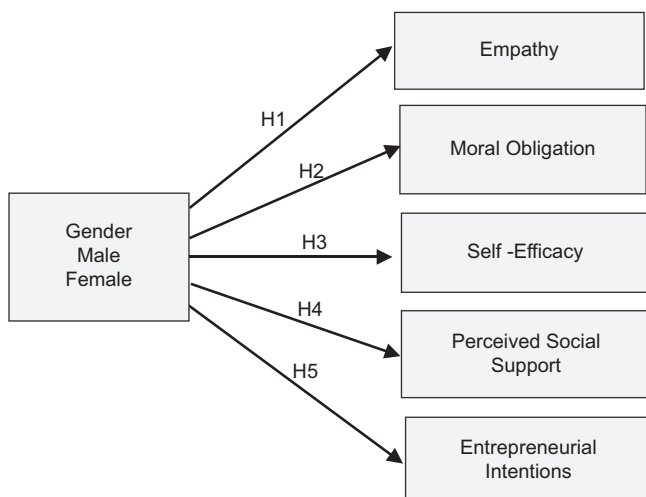


Fig. 1: Recommended research model.

normative beliefs about expected behaviors (Haines et al., 2008). Moral principles influence community behavior and predict self-esteem as they encourage helping others.

Hockerts (2017) defines self-efficacy as a person’s belief in their capacity for behavior. Self-efficacy precedes social and entrepreneurial behavior (Issa and Al-Salami, 2023), motivating individuals to address societal issues. Perceived social support reflects community attitudes and moral backing, influencing goals and intentions. Expectations for funding and support are raised in social entrepreneurship discussions. SEIs refer to students’ future enterprise aspirations. This study examines students’ likelihood of pursuing SEP careers.

VII. RESULTS

Male and female students’ responses from diverse university backgrounds, rural/urban areas, and various specializations are compared across five hypotheses (H1-H5). Cronbach’s α (Table I) for all variables ($\alpha \geq 0.7$) assures sample representativeness. The consistency coefficient (Alpha) surpasses 0.92 (close to 1) across all domains (Table I). This indicates a high level of constancy, suggesting that the topics and their questions are consistent and compatible (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

It is widely believed that women are more inclined to engage in charitable and social projects due to their perceived greater empathy for less fortunate individuals. This is supported by Table II from hypothesis 1, which shows that the mean responses between male and female students are not nearly equal for all independent variables, with male students displaying slightly higher standard deviations.

This suggests that women’s responses are less variable. Therefore, H1 was accepted ($P = 0.007 < \alpha = 0.05$). The differences in average values across all departments can be seen in Fig. 2.

The results of Table III indicate that the relationship between the gender of public and private university students and the independent variable (moral commitment) is not significant, with a significance level much >0.05 ($P = 0.149 > \alpha = 0.05$), therefore H2 was rejected. Fig. 3 shows the differences in average values across all departments.

TABLE I
CRONBACH’S ALPHA FOR RESEARCH’S VARIABLES

No.	Variables	Cronbach’s alpha
1	Empathy	0.920
2	Moral-obligation	0.919
3	Perceived social support	0.929
4	Entrepreneurial intentions	0.951
5	Self-efficacy	0.941

TABLE II
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR EMPATHY

Gender * Empathy	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	6.065	5	1.098	3.401	0.007
Within groups	34.990	106	0.333		
Total	41.018	111			

Perceived self-efficacy is described as being related to judgments about an individual’s success in executing the required courses of action to handle potential situations. The 3rd hypothesis tested in this study indicates that there are statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the responses of male and female students (as in Table IV). Based on the current results, this hypothesis was accepted ($P = 0.028 < \alpha = 0.05$). Differences in average values across all sections can be observed in Fig. 4.

The results of the 4th hypothesis (as in Table V) indicate that there are no statistically significant differences ($P = 0.059 > \alpha = 0.05$) in students’ responses to the independent variable of perceived social support across different specializations. As anticipated, students with low social support interpreted new supportive behaviors more negatively compared to students with high social support, and they also recalled a lower proportion of behaviors perceived as helpful.

Based on the current results (in Table VI), hypothesis 5 is accepted ($P = 0.031 < \alpha = 0.05$), showing significant gender differences in EI. Female students had lower intentions, consistent with Zhao et al. (2005). The differences in mean values across all sections are illustrated in Figs. 5 and 6.

VIII. DISCUSSION

It is important to activate the role of youth in the process of social entrepreneurship and increase their awareness.

TABLE III
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR MORAL OBLIGATION

Gender * Moral obligation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	4.108	5	0.822	1.665	0.149
Within groups	52.308	106	0.493		
Total	56.417	111			

TABLE IV
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR SELF –EFFICACY

Gender * Self – Efficacy	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	4.953	5	0.991	2.622	0.028
Within groups	40.054	106	0.378		
Total	45.008	111			

TABLE V
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

Gender * Perceived Social Support	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	6.677	5	1.335	2.209	0.059
Within groups	64.076	106	0.604		
Total	70.753	111			

TABLE VI
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS

Gender * Entrepreneurial Intentions	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	5.653	5	1.131	2.575	0.031
Within groups	46.549	106	0.439		
Total	52.202	111			

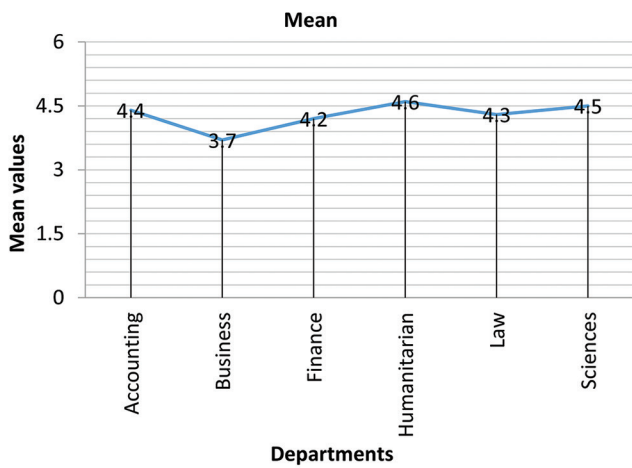


Fig. 2: Average values across all departments for empathy variable.

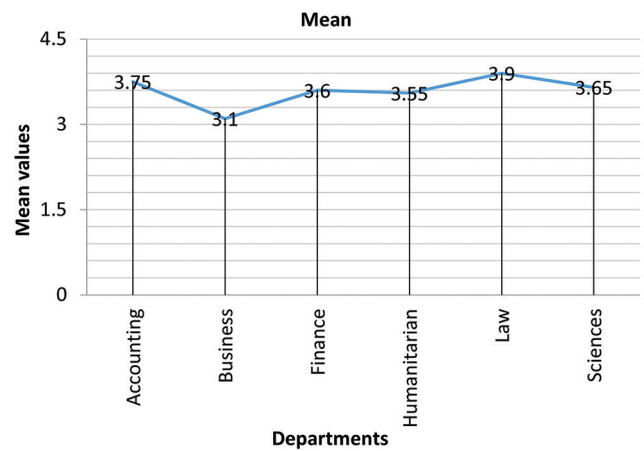


Fig. 5: Average values across all departments for perceived social support variable.

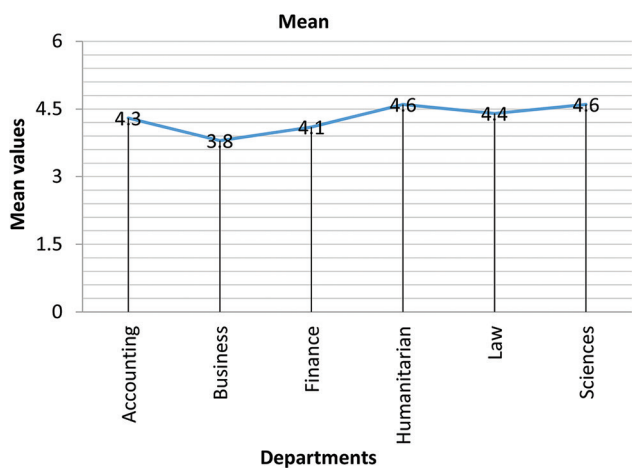


Fig. 3: Average values across all departments for moral obligation variable.

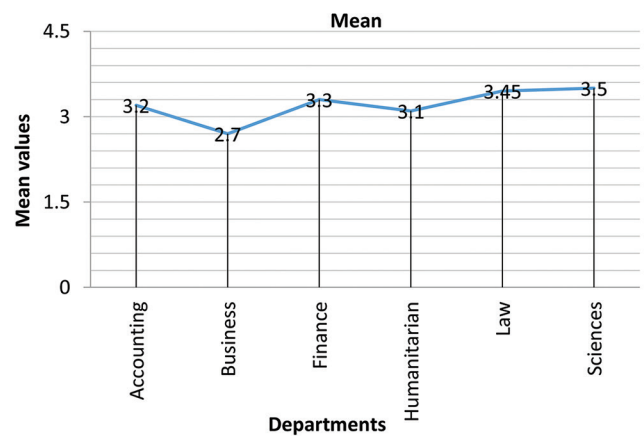


Fig. 6: Average values across all departments for entrepreneurial intentions variable.

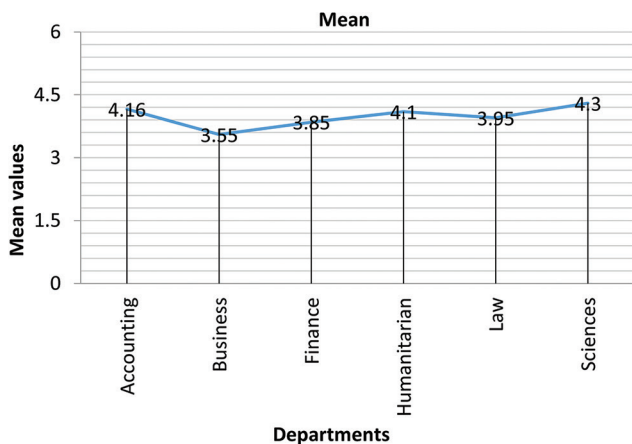


Fig. 4: Average values across all departments for self – efficacy variable.

Academic institutions in Syria lack methods and methods for educating young groups on which the development of the country's future depends. They also lack people with experience in this field, not because they do not exist, but because they are not used as effective consultants during the current and future stages.

IX. CONCLUSION

The empirical test of the person-entrepreneur fit model in this research leads to two main conclusions:

First, the results align with those of Kautonen et al., 2015; Mair and Noboa, 2006; Maziriri et al., 2024, despite some contradictions due to data limitations and cultural differences. Even amid Syria's economic and social depression, there are individuals willing and able to work as entrepreneurs.

Second, this study highlights the importance of enhancing human skills and awareness, especially among students, who are crucial for future sustainability, empathy, and charitable works.

Those eager to address Syria's social problems urgently need education and training from SEP experts. There is significant interest in entrepreneurship within the country. These efforts can help bridge societal gaps, fostering development and prosperity through human resource creation.

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