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Social Entrepreneurship Teaching and Learning: Opportunity Identification Using the Social Gap-Opportunity Assessment Canvas (SGO Canvas)

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Abstract:

In today's high-tech world, marked by the widespread use of advanced technology, the traditional approach to education—in which knowledge is simply communicated from lecturers to students—is becoming increasingly obsolete. This change needs a shift to a learner-centered strategy that emphasizes active participation and critical thinking, whereby educators must adapt their teaching approaches to provide enriching and effective learning experiences that encourage students to think critically and apply their knowledge in real-world circumstances. This paper presents the Social Gap-Opportunity Assessment Canvas (SGO Canvas), an innovative teaching and learning tool developed to help students deepen their understanding of the social entrepreneurship process and the creation of opportunities within complex social contexts. With its primary objective to guide learners in proposing viable social entrepreneurship projects that are grounded in real-life situations, the analysis of students' reflective reports and their SGO Canvases revealed that the students were able to systematically articulate and navigate the dual processes of social gap identification and opportunity creation. This reflects the ability of the SGO Canvas to empower students to identify social issues that demand attention while also uncovering potential avenues for impactful entrepreneurial solutions.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship, innovative teaching and learning, learner-centered approach

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology especially the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in recent years is transforming the conventional teaching and learning landscape (Hughes, 2023), whereby the traditional educational model of merely transmitting knowledge from instructors to learners is gradually becoming outdated. This shift necessitates a transition to a learner-centered strategy that prioritizes active engagement and critical thinking and analysis, requiring educators to adapt their pedagogical methods to deliver enriching and effective learning environments that promote critical thinking and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts.

Entrepreneurship education has attained academic acceptance as a discipline of study (Johnson et al., 2006; Mwasalwiba, 2010), serves as a policy instrument in numerous countries (Rae et al. 2014), and possesses the ability to foster local community development (Bravo 2016; Steiner et al. 2018). Nonetheless, owing to a wide array of objectives, learning goals, and pedagogical approaches, there is a lack of unanimity about the teaching and learning of the subject (Alberti et al. 2004; Bennett 2006). Social entrepreneurship education, as a part of entrepreneurship education, is relatively new to the scene of higher education (Joos & Leaman, 2014), as its concept came into sight in the 1980s (Kadir & Sarif, 2016). Nevertheless, social entrepreneurship education has become increasingly popular in equipping people with skills to create positive social change (Karatas-Ozkan et al., 2023). The teaching and learning of social entrepreneurship should

prioritize experiential learning and stakeholder engagement to effectively equip students with the practical skills required to address real-world situations (Issa et al., 2024).

From the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, social entrepreneurship has experienced significant growth in attention and enthusiasm from various parties including social entrepreneurs, non-profit organizations as well for-profit businesses due to its potential to create positive changes by addressing social, economic, and environmental issues. There has been tremendous growth in social entrepreneurship education and courses in colleges and universities worldwide (Brock & Steiner, 2009; Joos & Leaman, 2014; Li & Yuan, 2019). The approach to social entrepreneurship education has also been considerably diverse, incorporating instructional methods ranging from traditional lectures and applied workshops to consulting on real-world issues and solutions (Frank, 2005; Gunn et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the learners' ability to understand the complex interplay between social challenges and the creation of viable opportunities has yet to be fully explored.

Therefore, this paper presents the Social Gap-Opportunity Assessment Canvas (SGO Canvas), an innovative teaching and learning tool based on the established frameworks of the opportunity creation process (Guclu, Dees, and Battle-Anderson (2002) and the Consumer Trend Canvas (Trendwatching, 2014). The six-step process of the canvas was developed with the intention of helping students in developing their capacity to better comprehend the process of social entrepreneurship and to develop their ability to recognize chances for entrepreneurial endeavours in the middle of a variety of social challenges and difficulties.

OBJECTIVE

One of the main issues in teaching social entrepreneurship course is to ensure the students can come up with a good project that takes into consideration both social issues and viable opportunities. Therefore, the primary objective of the SGO Canvas is to guide learners in proposing viable social entrepreneurship projects that are grounded in real-life situations. This involves comprehensively understanding the dynamics of social entrepreneurship, including how opportunities can arise even amidst significant social challenges and the efforts already undertaken by government agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations.

In addition to the main objective, the SGO Canvas seeks to achieve a few other important goals:

1. To encourage students to engage in meaningful knowledge-sharing and intellectual discussions through interactive learning experiences.
2. To motivate students to conduct their research on pressing social issues, emerging trends, and existing social assets. By mapping these elements onto the canvas, students can identify gaps and opportunities for innovation, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in social entrepreneurship.
3. To cultivate an environment where creative and innovative thinking is encouraged. Students are empowered to explore potential opportunities that arise from social challenges, thus equipping them with the mindset needed to tackle real-world problems effectively.

By integrating the SGO Canvas into the teaching and learning process, students will be able to not only enhance their academic experience; but also prepare them to be thoughtful leaders and changemakers in their communities. This approach acknowledges that education is not just about acquiring knowledge but also developing the skills necessary to apply that knowledge in ways that can create a positive social impact. Therefore, the use of innovative learning tools such as SGO Canvas reflects the use of progressive pedagogical methods to foster a learning environment that nurtures both the intellectual and personal growth of the students.

APPLICATION OF THE SGO CANVAS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

As Albert Einstein famously stated, "In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity." This insightful quote resonates deeply with the social entrepreneurship course that is currently being offered for the Master of Applied Entrepreneurship program. In this course, students are tasked with understanding the complex interplay between social challenges and the creation of viable opportunities. Each semester, students face the considerable challenge of proposing innovative social entrepreneurship projects that effectively address both social and economic issues affecting underprivileged communities.

Recognizing the difficulties students encounter in this process and taking inspiration from Alex Osterwalder's groundbreaking Business Model Canvas (BMC), the Social Gap-Opportunity Assessment Canvas (SGO Canvas) was developed. This innovative tool is grounded in established frameworks of the social entrepreneurship process articulated by Guclu, Dees, and Battle-Anderson (2002) as illustrated by Figure 1, and the Consumer Trend Canvas (CTC) of Trendwatching (2014), depicted in Figure 2.
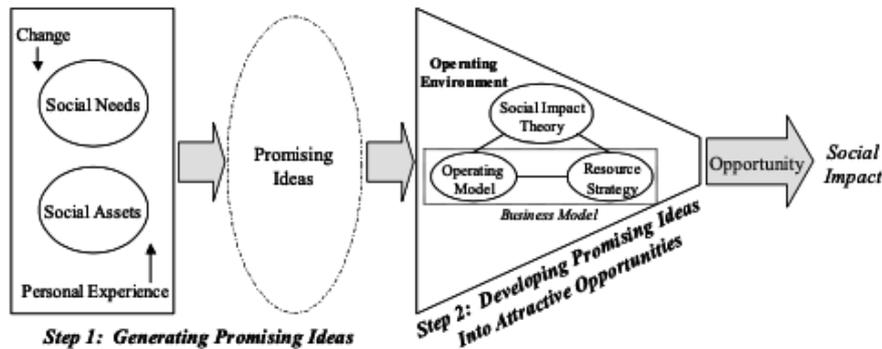

Figure 1: The Opportunity Creation Process
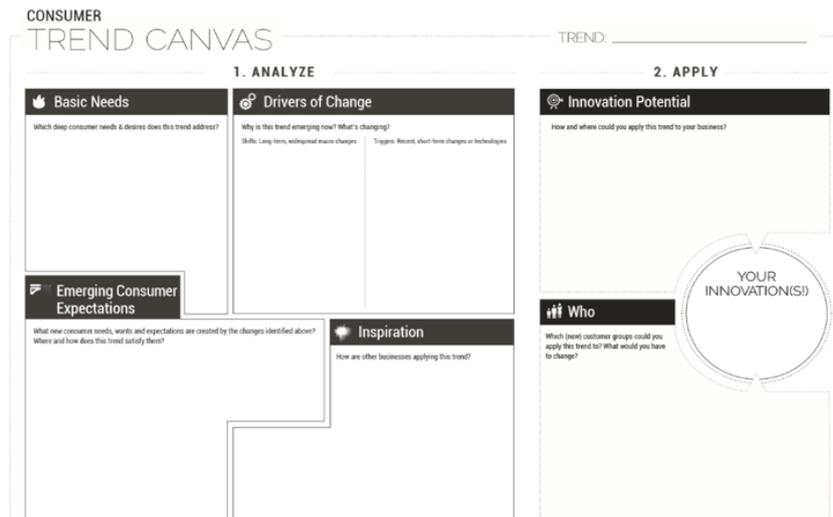(Guclu et al., 2002)

Figure 2: The Consumer Trend Canvas
by Trendwatching (2014)

Consequently, through a meticulous adaption of those two frameworks, the SGO Canvas, seen in Figure 3, functions as an essential tool for students, allowing them to systematically express and manage both processes of gap identification

and opportunity creation. By guiding students through these critical steps, the canvas empowers them to identify social issues that demand attention, such as urban poverty, access to education, unemployed youth, substance abuse, and domestic violence, just to name a few, while also uncovering potential avenues for impactful entrepreneurial solutions.
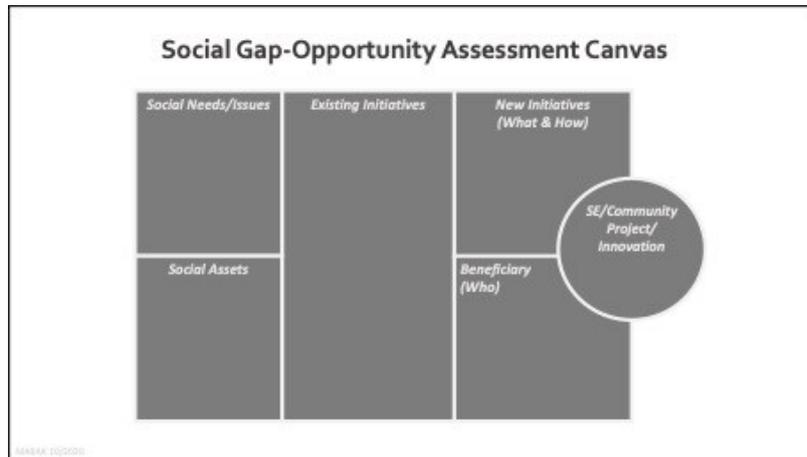

Figure 3: The Social Gap-Opportunity Assessment Canvas

In addition, the SGO Canvas helps students to align social missions—for instance, reducing unemployment among youths, increasing access to education for urban poor children—with economic viability, ensuring that the projects proposed are not only socially beneficial but also sustainable in the long run. This approach encourages students to think creatively and strategically, equipping them with the skills necessary to design projects that can genuinely transform lives and communities.

The steps in the SGO Canvas

Step 1: Identify the social needs/issues
The SGO Canvas begins with students engaging in comprehensive desk research, coupled with brief interviews with their selected communities. Through this dual approach, students gain valuable insights into pressing social issues that require innovative solutions, allowing them to pinpoint discrepancies between socially desirable conditions and the prevailing realities faced by community members.

Step 2: Identify existing social assets
In the subsequent phase of the SGO Canvas, students are required to identify existing social assets that have been addressed by government agencies, private sector entities, and non-governmental organizations, yet still fall short of meeting the broader needs of society. This involves compiling an extensive inventory of social assets available within the country, regardless of their origin or ownership. By recognizing these assets, students can better understand the landscape of resources that may be leveraged to effect meaningful change.

Step 3: Explore existing social initiatives
In conjunction with the identification of social assets, students are also encouraged to explore a wide array of existing initiatives aimed at addressing long-standing social challenges within the community. This comprehensive examination allows students to appreciate the various strategies and approaches employed by different stakeholders in their efforts to solve these pressing issues.

Step 4: Propose new initiatives for selected beneficiaries
Following the identification of social issues, assets, and extant initiatives, students engage in a collaborative brainstorming session. This phase is crucial, as it enables students to generate a diverse range of ideas aimed at developing new initiatives that can effectively benefit either the same target groups or new beneficiaries. The

emphasis here is on creative problem-solving and the formulation of actionable plans that address identified gaps in existing services and initiatives.

Step 5: Naming the initiative/project

The conclusion of this process involves the meticulous compilation of all elements within the SGO Canvas. Students are then tasked with naming their projects and aligning their proposed offerings with the specific needs of the beneficiaries. This strategic alignment is essential for addressing the shortcomings of prior initiatives, services, and projects, ultimately enhancing the likelihood of successful implementation. Figures 4 to 6 depict the examples of the SGO Canvas developed by the students of the Master of Applied Entrepreneurship for Social Entrepreneurship course.
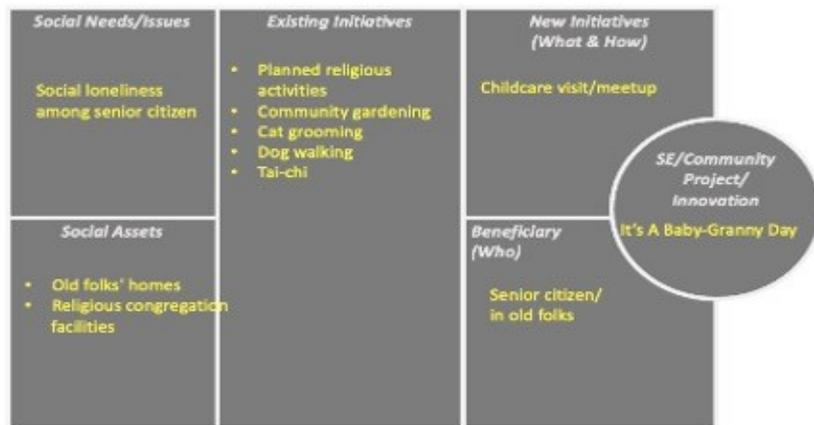
Figure 4: Example of SGO Canvas - 1
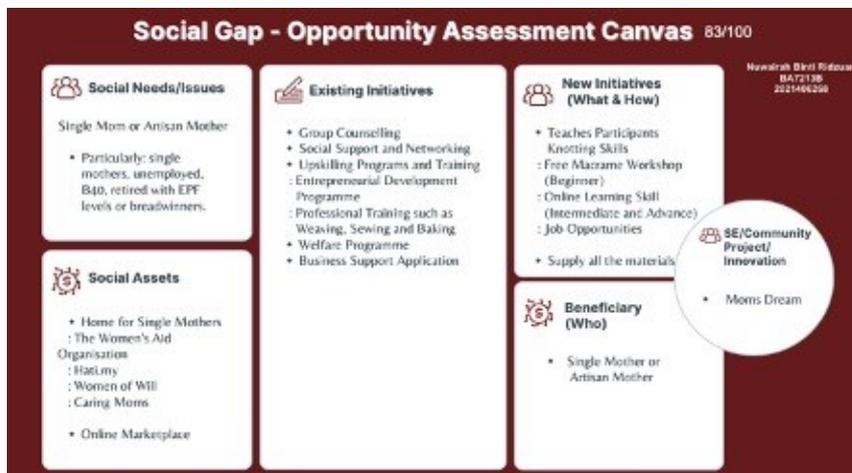
Figure 5: Example of SGO Canvas - 2

Figure 6: Example of SGO Canvas - 3

The incorporation of the SGO Canvas within the teaching and learning framework offers numerous advantages:

1. It allows critical examination of social issues, enabling students to access social resources and assess the effectiveness of current social campaigns.
2. It provides a dynamic platform for students to brainstorm and generate innovative ideas, which can lead to impactful solutions for identified social challenges.
3. It encourages interactive discussions between students and lecturers, facilitating a comprehensive exchange of ideas supported by visual aids, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative methodology, employing document analysis of students' reflective reports to collect the necessary data. The main reason for selecting the qualitative approach was its exploratory nature. The study employed purposive sampling, gathering rich data from participants based on their experience using the SGO Canvas and interactions during teaching and learning sessions, enabling the researcher to explore comprehensive views from the participants (Kadir & Sarif, 2016). The study examined twelve reflective reports from students enrolled in a social entrepreneurship course who had utilized the SGO Canvas. This enables the researcher to thoroughly comprehend students' perceptions of the SGO Canvas as a tool for articulating social concerns and generating opportunities. This document analysis is an appropriate data collection technique that allows researchers to examine participants' feedback and perspectives (Morgan, 2022). The analysis stopped at the twelfth participant as it reached the saturation point.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Document Analysis

The document analysis revealed diverse themes that may provide insights into the participants' views and opinions. A comprehensive analysis of twelve reflective reports yielded a total of 10 distinct themes, presented in Table 1. These themes were mentioned by more than 6 participants in their reflective reports submitted to the instructor together with their SGO Canvas. However, in this paper, only 2 to 3 reflections for each theme were extracted to present the perspectives of the participants on the use of the SGO Canvas.

Table 1: Emerged Themes for Document Analysis

No.	Participant / Emerged themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	T
1.	Exploration of Existing Initiatives	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12
2.	Inventory of Social Assets	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12
3.	Insights into Social Issues	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	11
4.	Creative Thinking Encouraged	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	10
5.	Real-World Problem-Solving Mindset	■	■	■		■	■	■	■		■	■	■	10
6.	Empowerment to Explore Opportunities	■	■	■	■	■		■	■		■	■	■	10
7.	Viable Social Entrepreneurship Proposals	■	■	■		■	■	■	■		■	■	■	10
8.	Nurtured Learning Environment	■	■		■	■		■	■	■	■		■	9
9.	Identified Gaps & Opportunities	■	■		■		■	■	■		■	■	■	9
10.	Understanding Complexities	■	■		■		■		■	■		■	■	8

Emerged Themes

1. *Exploration of Existing Initiatives*

   As the SGO Canvas itself required the participants to explore existing social initiatives that have been developed, organized, and conducted by various organizations, it is a consensus among all participants that the SGO Canvas helped them to identify the element.

   Reflection 1: "…sometimes we tend to overlook all the initiatives that have been done to help the beneficiary, but with this thing (the SGO Canvas), we have to do some research from the internet…"

   Reflection 2: "…some of the programs are popular, but some are not, so when we have this canvas, we looked for both, popular and not-so-popular initiatives."

   Reflection 3: "I never knew that there are so many initiatives done by our government and NGOs. When we are forced to find it using this canvas, then only we know".

2. *Inventory of Social Assets*

   The SGO Canvas also necessitated the students to identify and list all the social assets available for the beneficiaries regardless of the entities that are providing those assets. As a result, all the participants agreed that the canvas forced them to create an inventory of social assets.

   Reflection 1: "…it is beneficial to us as well to know all the social assets available to those in need…"

   Reflection 2: "…we take things for granted, and we ask more from the government, whereas they have provided countless social assets to the community. This canvas is an eye-opener as it requires us to list the assets (social assets)".

3. *Insights into Social Issues*

   Another significant theme whereby most of the participants agreed on was that the canvas helped them to uncover not only the social issues that are apparent to them but also the root causes that are often overlooked.

   Reflection 1: "Social issues are relatively easy to spot, but the reasons behind their existence are intricate. With this canvas, we dived deeper to understand them…"

   Reflection 2: "…thanks to our lecturer for this canvas, we have better perspectives on social issues".

4. *Creative Thinking Encouraged*

   Many of the students acknowledged that the use of the canvas encouraged creative thinking as they had to generate a few new initiatives to overcome the less effective existing initiatives. Idea generation and screening require creative thinking to come up with feasible and viable solutions.

Reflection 1: "Social issues are relatively easy to spot, but the reasons behind their existence are intricate. With this canvas, we dived deeper to understand them…"
Reflection 2: "…thanks to our lecturer for this canvas, we have better perspectives on social issues".

5. *Real-World Problem-Solving Mindset*

Ten participants notably expressed that the SGO Canvas can help them think of how to solve the real issues or problems faced by the community. The canvas coerced them to scrutinize the real world, thus shifting the students' mindset into 'real-world' issues and solutions.

Reflection 1: "The arrangement of six elements of the canvas guided us on how to think of the real-world issues and how to practically solve them".
Reflection 2: "…as a student, we were shortsighted about the reality of social issues and why it happened and how to solve it. Most of the time we thought the government or NGOs would solve it. But now, I know that we should play our roles in helping others. It shifts my mind…"

6. *Empowerment to Explore Opportunities*

Exploring opportunities is one of the key dimensions of entrepreneurship. The participants highlighted that the canvas, which comprises six elements, enabled them to comprehend how to explore opportunities amidst social difficulties.

Reflection 1: "…it looks contradict to me, however when the lecturer showed the quote by Einstein, then I realized that opportunities exist everywhere, and the canvas guided me to explore it"
Reflection 2: "…the steps in the canvas are simple to follow, so it helps our process of screening and discovering new opportunities".

7. *Viable Social Entrepreneurship Proposals*

Any entrepreneur must be able to craft not only a good proposal but also a viable one to gain the trust of potential investors. Most of the students reflected that they managed to create a proposal that is based a real-world information gathered through the canvas.

Reflection 1: "…the info collected for each block of canvas allows me to propose a good SE project"
Reflection 2: "…we were struggling to propose a project based on social issues, but later when we went through the steps in the canvas, then only we realized that opportunities are everywhere, so we managed to draft a good proposal".

8. *Nurtured Learning Environment*

Nine participants highlighted that the use of the canvas as a teaching and learning tool has resulted in the establishment of a nurturing environment that provides plenty of learning opportunities to the students.

Reflection 1: "…canvas like BMC and SGO Canvas eases our understanding of certain topics that considerably would take some time to comprehend. This way, the lecturer is fostering a good learning environment…"
Reflection 2: "…a nice learning vibe is important for us as master students. We are working adults dealing with all kinds of stress, so we would be very grateful if the lecturer could help reduce some of our stress by using a good tool and creating a conducive learning environment".

9. *Identified Gaps & Opportunities*

As the name of the tool suggests, the SGO Canvas has helped the participants to identify good opportunities behind the social difficulties faced by some communities by better comprehending the social gaps and the challenges encountered.

Reflection 1: "...it can be challenging for us, as students, to digest the concept of the social gaps and how entrepreneurial opportunities exist behind it. The way the lecturer used the canvas and explained it to us made us able to use it and understand it better".

Reflection 2: "... the canvas shows us the way to see the gaps and what are the opportunities that we can exploit...".

10. *Understanding Complexities*

The main purpose of having the SGO Canvas in a social entrepreneurship course is to help students understand the complexities of interconnected social concerns and entrepreneurial prospects. The students clearly stated that the use of the SGO Canvas broadened their perspective on social issues, their underlying causes, and possible solutions.

Reflection 1: "...we are tasked with understanding the complex interplay between social challenges and entrepreneurial opportunities, and the SGO Canvas helping..."

Reflection 2: "...thanks to our lecturer for this canvas, we have better perspectives on social issues".

In summary, the reflective reports submitted by the students unveiled ten major themes, as presented in Table 1, which parallel to the main objective of having the SGO Canvas, i.e. to guide learners in proposing viable social entrepreneurship projects that are grounded in real-life situations. These themes underlined the value of the canvas in assisting the students to comprehensively assess and understand the dynamics of social environment and social entrepreneurship, including how opportunities can arise even amidst significant social challenges and the efforts already undertaken by various parties including government agencies, the private sector, and NGOs.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the complex interplay between social difficulties and the creation of feasible entrepreneurial opportunities. When assigned to propose a good social entrepreneurship project, students have been struggling to come up with innovative social entrepreneurship projects that effectively address both social and economic issues affecting underprivileged communities. Hence, the SGO Canvas not only equips students with essential skills in social analysis and problem-solving but also empowers them to contribute meaningfully to the communities. This approach underscores the importance of practical, hands-on learning in the fields of social entrepreneurship, social innovation, and community engagement.

In essence, the findings of this research contribute valuable insights towards the development of appropriate innovative teaching and learning tools in the institution of higher learning. It also provides a significant contribution to the domain of entrepreneurship education, specifically social entrepreneurship education through its investigation of the SGO Canvas and how it helps students in understanding the complex social issues and opportunity creation.

Despite its significant implications for a better understanding of the innovative teaching and learning tool, the scope of this study was limited to a small group of master's students taking social entrepreneurship course in only one public university in the country. In order to achieve a more comprehensive representation of the population, future research could encompass a wider range of students who are taking social entrepreneurship courses across all higher learning institutions nationwide. Broader quantitative research methods such as surveys would be essential for better generalizability and findings that more truly reflect the total population. Nevertheless, this research has effectively achieved its primary objective of exploring the effectiveness of the SGO Canvas.

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