Determinants of Youth Readiness for Social Entrepreneurship: Evidence from Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship has not merely grown globally but has emerged as a telling sign of how societies reconfigure their ways of dealing with persistent social and economic crises through ventures that claim sustainability not only in financial terms but in their capacity to reproduce meaningfully within communities. The shift is not simply about "profit plus community" but about the practical redefinition of what entrepreneurship itself entails when its justification must include social impact as a criterion of legitimacy. Yet in Malaysia, youth participation in social entrepreneurship remains limited, signaling a readiness gap and a lag between policy aspirations as codified in the National Entrepreneurship Policy 20202030. Drawing on qualitative methods, this study employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six social entrepreneurs to examine how readiness is discussed and experienced. The thematic analysis thus revealed three dimensions: awareness regarding social issues, entrepreneurial support, and the impact of role models on social enterprises. According to the findings, respondents emphasized that the dynamic character of readiness emerged through practice, contextual learning, and the encounter with lived challenges, rather than as an initial precondition for entry into the field. In this way, this study contributes to ongoing discussions of social entrepreneurship by foregrounding practitioner voices. For policymakers, educators, and institutions, these findings highlight how the cultivation of readiness cannot be mandated but must be nurtured as a social and practical repertoire that would enable Malaysian youth to inhabit entrepreneurial roles that are both economically viable and socially meaningful.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship, youth entrepreneur, social entrepreneurship readiness, role model, entrepreneurial resources, social awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The present concern with social entrepreneurship is not merely with new "business models" nor with the conventional vocabulary of market expansion or nonprofit initiative, but with the recognition that what has emerged is a socio-economic fact of considerable significance, a hybrid formation that unsettles traditional boundaries between public, private, and voluntary domains (Dacin et al., 2010; Mair & Marti, 2006). These hybrid ventures in social enterprises have come to address some of the most entrenched societal challenges; poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. The claim, of course, is that they step in precisely where the older solutions, welfare systems and market mechanisms alike, fall short (Palakshappa et al., 2024; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). What it means to say this is not entirely simple. It is one thing to note, as the Global Innovation Index 2024 does (WIPO, 2024), that there are between 10 and 11 million such ventures worldwide, producing an economic footprint of some USD 2 trillion; it is another to see what is implied, that social entrepreneurship

is now inscribed as a driver of both innovation and impact. Empirical reviews point in the same direction that the phenomenon is attracting widening attention, and not only for its technical contribution to sustainability, but because it redefines what counts as sustainable. And here, the alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 and SDG 10 (UNDP, 2015), is telling. Social enterprises are made to stand as more than practical fixes; they serve also as symbols and instruments of a development imagined as inclusive, resilient, and equitable. In this sense, social entrepreneurship is not simply a marginal supplement to existing economic logics but a paradigmatic re-description of how societies imagine their capacities to innovate, to endure, and to reconfigure responses to their most persistent social and environmental dilemmas.

It is now widely acknowledged in Malaysia that social entrepreneurship is becoming a vital element of national economic development. What this means in practice, however, remains open to discussion. The state has taken deliberate steps to embed it within policy, most notably through the National Entrepreneurship Policy 20202030 and the establishment of Malaysian Research Accelerator for Technology and Innovation (MRANTI), the new institution formed by merging Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Center (MaGIC) and Technology Park Malaysia. These measures point clearly to an official commitment to positioning social entrepreneurship as a tool for building a resilient and inclusive economy. Around this vision stand ministries and agencies such as Ministry of Entrepreneur and Co-operative Development (MECD), National Institute of Entrepreneurship (INSKEN), National Entrepreneur Group Economic Fund (TEKUN Nasional), and Malaysian Foundation for Innovation (YIM). Their mandate is to promote entrepreneurial literacy, foster grassroots innovation, and provide the kinds of community-based support that can anchor entrepreneurial practice in everyday life. Taken together, these measures give the appearance of a comprehensive and well-coordinated framework, one that seems fully aligned with national aspirations. Yet the question still presses: do these structures translate into lived participation, and in particular, do they succeed in engaging the youth who are so often invoked as the drivers of Malaysia's future? It is here, in the gap between policy ambition and everyday practice, that the limits of institutional promotion of social entrepreneurship become visible (see Figure 1).
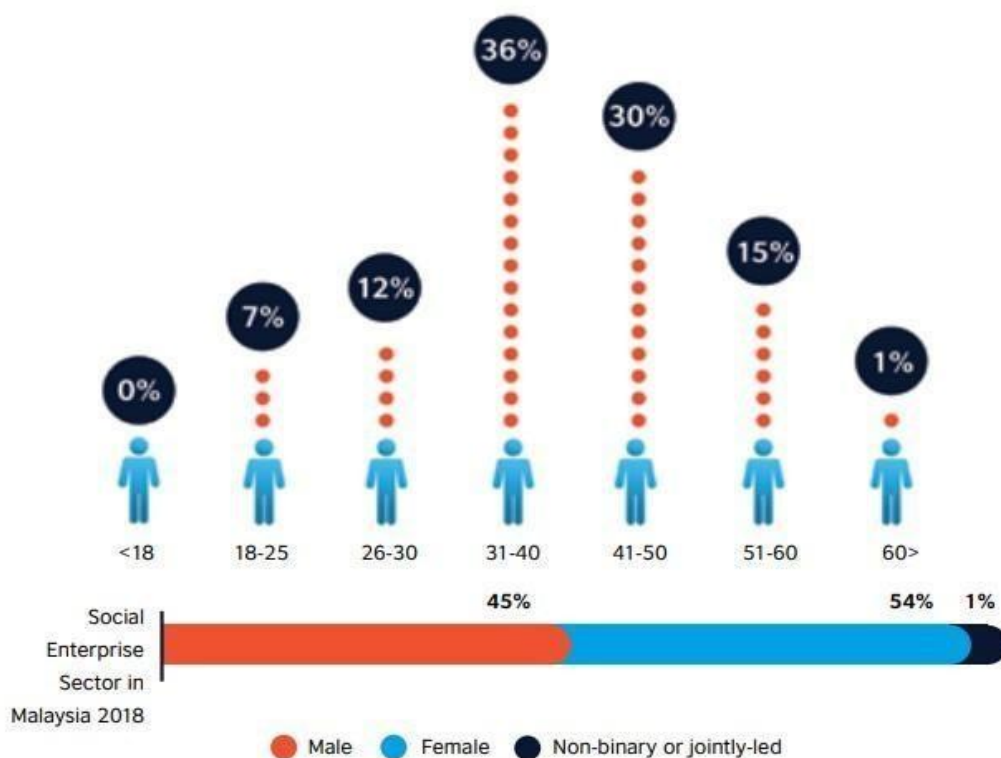

Figure 1 The percentage of social enterprise leadership based on gender and age.

Source: United Nation ESCAP & British Council (2019)

It is evident from Figure 1 that youth participation in Malaysia's social enterprise sector remains strikingly limited. Only 7% of social entrepreneurs are between the ages of 18 and 25, while 12% fall within the 26 to 30 brackets. The majority are concentrated instead in the 31 to 50 age range. In contrast, most social entrepreneurs

fall within the 31-50 age range, suggesting that younger individuals may not yet have the exposure, confidence, or institutional backing required to enter the field.

Common challenges

Challenge	Percentage
Cash flow	55%
Lack of awareness of social enterprise in Malaysia	36%
Recruiting staff or volunteers	33%
Obtaining other forms of financing	31%
Obtaining grants	27%
Availability of suitable premises or workspaces	22%
Lack of access to business support and advice	21%
Government regulations and administrative burdens	19%
Shortage of business skills	17%

Figure 2 Social Entrepreneurship in Malaysia

Source: United Nation ESCAP & British Council (2019)

The inadequate representation of youth in Malaysia's social entrepreneurship sector, as shown in Figure 1, appears closely tied to the broader structural and operational challenges faced by social enterprises themselves. Figure 2 makes clear that the most frequently cited difficulty is cash flow limitation (55%), followed by a lack of public awareness of social enterprises (36%) and the persistent problem of recruiting staff or volunteers (33%).

These pressures affect not only the sustainability of existing ventures but also shape how young people perceive the very feasibility of social entrepreneurship as a career path. When funding is limited, support is scarce, and awareness of the ecosystem is low, the readiness of young people is easily weakened. External constraints of this kind, combined with internal factors such as limited exposure or a lack of role models, suggest that readiness is never merely an individual trait but something embedded in the wider environment. Addressing these interlocking barriers is therefore essential if the gap in youth participation is to be narrowed and a more enabling climate fostered for the next generation of Malaysian social entrepreneurs.

Readiness for social entrepreneurship cannot be reduced to only technical skills or funding. It involves the broader capacities, both psychological and experiential, that allow young people to perceive opportunities, confront social challenges, and carry ventures forward with impact. Qualities such as self-efficacy, empathy, exposure to pressing social issues, and a sense of responsibility to the community all contribute to shaping this readiness (Hockerts, 2017; Mair & Noboa, 2006). Yet much of the existing literature treats readiness as a static trait, the product of formal education, business training, or models of entrepreneurial intention (Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010; Gelderen et al., 2008). This perspective misses the dynamic, socially embedded ways in which young people construct their entrepreneurial identities and assess their ability to act as changemakers (Gelderen et al., 2008). Emerging research suggests that readiness is shaped in the course of lived experience; through role models, community interactions, and direct exposure to local social issues, which together form the

motivational and contextual terrain in which youth develop the capacity to engage meaningfully in social entrepreneurship (Ahrari et al., 2019; Bacq & Alt, 2018).

Figures 1 and 2 reveal an urgent need to examine social entrepreneurship readiness among Malaysian youth. Figure 1 shows a clear generational gap, with those aged 18-30 making up only a small portion of the social business sector. This suggests that many young Malaysians do not see themselves as ready or equipped to participate. Figure 2 highlights the structural barriers that reinforce this absence: limited access to capital, low public awareness, and insufficient entrepreneurial support all restrict entry and threaten sustainability within the sector. These interconnected gaps indicate that readiness is shaped not only by individual traits but also by broader environmental, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. Understanding youth readiness is therefore essential, both to see how young people develop the confidence, motivation, and capacity to engage, and to inform interventions that can close the participation gap, strengthen ecosystem support, and align with national goals like the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2020-2030. By examining six diverse case studies of social enterprises, this study investigates the experiential, relational, and contextual factors that shape readiness in real Malaysian settings. These community-based ventures function as small ecosystems of entrepreneurial learning and social change, demonstrating that readiness is not just taught but experienced, practiced, and passed on through collective action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Entrepreneurship in Global Perspectives

Over the past few decades, social entrepreneurship has gained significant global attention (Fiseha & Oni, 2022). A defining moment was the creation of the Ashoka Foundation in the United States in the late 1980s, the first organization dedicated to supporting social entrepreneurs worldwide and marking the formal emergence of the social entrepreneurship movement (McAnany, 2012). Social entrepreneurship applies entrepreneurial principles to address pressing social, environmental, and community challenges, and international organizations and governments increasingly see it as a strategic tool for advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing its potential to drive both economic and social transformation (Schmiedeknecht, 2020). While related to traditional entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship differs in mission and focus. It aims primarily to address societal problems while balancing social and economic goals (Adnan et al., 2018). As it grows within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, it merges profit-making with social impact, encouraging creativity, job creation, community development, and cross-sector collaboration (Saufi & Hong, 2024). These contributions have led many countries to implement policies and strategies that support its expansion (Hockerts, 2017).

Social Entrepreneurship in Malaysia

Social entrepreneurship first emerged in Malaysia in 1986 with the founding of Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM). Since that time, it has steadily gained visibility and attracted the attention of a wide range of stakeholders, including the Malaysian government (Law et al., 2024). A pivotal moment arrived in 2022 when the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperative (MEDAC) introduced the Social Entrepreneurship Blueprint 2030 (SEMy2030). The blueprint lays out a long-term national vision to strengthen and expand social enterprises, aiming for sustainable impact through innovative business models. At the same time, it seeks to strengthen policy support, widen access to essential resources, and cultivate entrepreneurial capacity, so that the structures, networks, and skills necessary for social entrepreneurship are not only available but actively engaged. In other words, it is a plan that treats social enterprise as a living system, where rules, resources, and relationships converge to make action possible, sustainable, and meaningful (MEDAC, 2022).

Youth play a vital role in advancing social entrepreneurship in Malaysia. They make up a substantial portion of the population, bringing creativity, fresh perspectives, and technological expertise to bear on pressing social and environmental challenges (Ramasamy et al., 2024). SEMy2030 positions youth as pivotal actors in the growth of sustainable social enterprises, acknowledging that their participation is essential for translating policy visions into tangible social and economic outcomes. As Bublitz et al. (2021) emphasize, with the right combination of training, mentorship, and access to resources, young people are well equipped to launch ventures that deliver both social impact and economic value. Yet much of this potential remains unrealized. Data indicate that while many young Malaysians hold favorable views toward social entrepreneurship, only a small proportion translate

this interest into sustained, concrete action (MOHE, 2021). The underlying challenge is one of readiness. Success in social entrepreneurship depends not only on technical skills or business knowledge but also on motivation, self-confidence, contextual understanding, and access to supportive networks (Yunus & Harun, 2020). In other words, the capacity to act as social entrepreneurs is deeply entwined with relational, psychological, and sociocultural conditions. Nurturing these dimensions is essential if youth are to fulfil their potential as agents of meaningful social transformation and as contributors to national development.

Social Entrepreneurship Readiness

Readiness, as Istiqomah et al. (2022) describe, is the capacity to respond appropriately to different situations. In the context of entrepreneurship, this readiness goes beyond simply knowing how to run a business; it involves cultivating the mindset and disposition to generate value for society. Social entrepreneurship readiness, as Ariska and Sahid (2022) emphasize, centers on creating lasting and positive impacts on the community rather than pursuing personal profit or performance alone. Education plays a crucial role in this process, equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to understand social issues and take meaningful action (Utomo et al., 2019). For young people, readiness is closely tied to their ability to recognize opportunities in their environment and translate gaps or problems into innovative solutions that generate social value (Zulfiqar et al., 2021). Yet it is not enough to have ideas; youth must also be able to access financial, social, and human resources to realize them. Melnikova et al. (2021) identify the dimensions of entrepreneurial readiness as behavioral, motivational, and personal-individual components, which collectively build psychological readiness and foster self-realization, resilience, and independence in contemporary socio-economic conditions. Within social entrepreneurship, these dimensions underscore that readiness is as much about mindset, motivation, and adaptive behavior as it is about skills and resources, highlighting the intricate interplay of personal, relational, and contextual factors that enable young people to pursue and sustain ventures capable of meaningful social transformation.

Social Awareness

Social awareness can be understood as an individual's capacity to perceive, interpret, and respond to social realities, shaping their attitudes and behaviors toward both societal challenges and interpersonal interactions (Nikolskaya & Kostrigin, 2019). It encompasses empathy, sensitivity to the needs of communities, and the ability to identify problems that go beyond personal or financial gain. In the realm of social entrepreneurship, social awareness becomes the lens through which pressing social and environmental issues are recognized and reframed as opportunities for innovative, sustainable solutions (Schaefer et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs who cultivate this awareness are better positioned to design ventures that genuinely address community needs while fostering longterm societal well-being. This dimension is particularly significant because it motivates action beyond selfinterest, encouraging young people to channel their concerns into entrepreneurial efforts that create social value (Hockerts, 2017). Moreover, social awareness forms the basis for building trust and relational capital within communities, helping initiatives remain relevant, effective, and adaptable over time (Rahman et al., 2016). It equips youth to navigate social realities, cultivate relationships, and leverage resources, which would transform into deliberate, sustained efforts that do not merely respond to problems but actively shape solutions.

Role Models

Role models are more than sources of inspiration; they are living demonstrations of what is possible, tangible proofs of effort, strategy, and perseverance made visible (San-Martín et al., 2022). From the perspective of social learning theory (Bandura, 1978), learning unfolds within social contexts, not only through direct experience but also by observing and interacting with others. Role models show that business is not merely about profit, but about addressing urgent social challenges – poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation – while maintaining economic viability (Maziriri et al., 2024; Tam et al., 2021). Role models make visible the oftenhidden paths by which intentions become actions, by which risk, purpose, and reward are balanced. In doing so, they do more than merely inspire; they model the very conditions of readiness itself. They reveal how insight, empathy, and initiative are not separate qualities but interwoven capacities that, when cultivated together, allow youth to navigate uncertainty, assess opportunities, and make decisions that carry both economic and social weight.

Entrepreneurial Resources

The term "resources" carries different meanings depending on the context. In psychology, resources are the tools, supports, and capacities that help individuals navigate life, pursue goals, overcome setbacks, and enhance their well-being (Panov, 2024). They are what people rely on when pressures mount, when challenges appear, when resilience and insight must be marshalled. In entrepreneurship, the term narrows: resources are the assets and capabilities that enable entrepreneurs to reach their objectives; operational, human, technical, financial, and the like (Zhou & Gao, 2019). Not every resource qualifies as entrepreneurial, and this distinction matters. In social entrepreneurship, resources take on a tangible and strategic role; they are what social entrepreneurs possess or can access to transform ideas into functioning ventures, to turn vision into practice, and to generate social impact (Drencheva et al., 2022; Clough et al., 2019). They guide decisions, highlight which opportunities matter, and translate abstract ideas into concrete action that moves beyond planning into tangible effect. Through these resources, entrepreneurs are able to craft ventures that do more than exist; they make a real, lasting difference in the world (Odetunde, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Sampling

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to examine how Malaysian youth develop readiness for social entrepreneurship. Such an approach was selected because it provides insight into personal experiences, processes of meaning-making, and the contextual factors that shape youth involvement in social enterprise. It also answers calls in the literature for more practice-based studies in developing contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, focusing on those directly involved in social entrepreneurship as founders, co-founders, or active youth members. Six respondents from different regions of Malaysia took part, all engaged in community-oriented social enterprises. The selection aimed to include diverse perspectives across gender, location, and organizational model while still allowing for in-depth analysis. The inclusion criteria were straightforward: participants had to be between 18 and 40 years old, actively engaged in a social enterprise within the past three years, and able to reflect on their experiences of entrepreneurial learning, social impact, and interaction with the wider ecosystem.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted in the Malay language for about 60 to 130 minutes. The interviews were assisted by three core thematic questions:

1. How did participants become aware of social issues relevant to their communities?
2. What kinds of support or training facilitated their entrepreneurial journey?
3. How did role models influence their readiness to act?

All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also kept, capturing nonverbal cues and contextual observations that could inform later interpretation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible and interpretive approach that seeks to identify, analyze, and report patterns of meaning while acknowledging the researcher's role in shaping interpretation (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this study, a theme is taken to mean a coherent and meaningful pattern within the data, one that speaks directly to the research questions and captures how participants made sense of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The analysis followed the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2014) and Terry et al. (2017). Second, initial codes were generated by marking keywords, phrases, and ideas that conveyed participants' perspectives on social entrepreneurship readiness. These codes were then organized into broader categories, forming the basis for emerging themes. In order to confirm that the themes were firmly rooted in the data, the transcripts were reviewed. In the final stage, the themes were refined, clearly defined, and integrated into a coherent narrative that structured the study's findings.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

This study focused on six experienced social entrepreneurs. They are in several distinct yet interconnected domains: training aspiring social entrepreneurs, implementing social entrepreneurship frameworks within agricultural ventures, and managing homestay enterprises structured around socially driven principles. Each participant offers a perspective shaped by both time and diversity of practice, perspectives that together illuminate the ways social entrepreneurship unfolds in Malaysia. Table 1 summarizes the social enterprises included in this study, listing each participant's designation and the sector in which their enterprise operates, and in doing so, it highlights the range of contexts in which social entrepreneurship is applied.

Table 1 Profile of social entrepreneurship expert participating in the study

Participant	Areas of Social Enterprise	Designation	Business sector
Participant 1	Terengganu	Deputy Chairman	Retail and Wholesale
Participant 2	Kelantan	Manager	Service-Based
Participant 3	Kelantan	Founder	Service-Based
Participant 4	Pahang	Manager	Tourism and Hospitality
Participant 5	Kedah	Founder	Agriculture and Agro-Based
Participant 6	Sabah	Founder	Retail and Wholesale

Source: Author's own work

The Factors Influencing Social Entrepreneurship Readiness among Youth in Malaysia

The analysis of six in-depth interviews brought into relief three interrelated characteristics that appear to underpin the readiness of Malaysian youth for social entrepreneurship: awareness of social issues, accessibility to entrepreneurial support, and the impact of role models. These characteristics appeared consistently throughout the participants' narratives, indicating that readiness cannot be understood as a simple personal trait to be acquired or assessed. Rather, it is a process embedded in social and contextual realities, one that unfolds through interaction, accumulates through experience, and is continually negotiated within the networks, opportunities, and challenges that shape young entrepreneurs' lives. Table 2 provides an overview of these emergent themes, highlighting the multifaceted nature of youth preparation within the Malaysian social entrepreneurial context, and Figure 2 illustrates the details mapping of major factors and its subfactors that contribute to social Entrepreneurship readiness among Malaysian youth.

Table 2 Summary of Thmes - Factors Influencing Social Entrepreneurship Readiness

Definition of Themes	Key Quotations	Frequencies
Awareness of Social Issues: Social awareness encompasses the ability to recognize and empathize with individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures.	1. "I didn't plan to become a social entrepreneur. It started when I saw too many of my friends and neighbors couldn't even afford basic groceries. That triggered something in me. I just couldn't ignore it."	5
Access to Entrepreneurial Support: The availability and utilization of various resources, services, and networks that assist entrepreneurs in starting, growing, and sustaining their ventures.	1. "When I joined a local program for young entrepreneurs, they didn't just teach us how to sell. They taught us how to pitch, how to understand our community's needs, and how to tell our story. That gave me confidence." 2. "We didn't have much money. But we had our phones, and we learnt how to market our products on TikTok. That's how our project grew."	2

Influence of role Models: Role models are individuals who stimulate, inspire, and influence others' decisions by serving as tangible examples of what can be achieved.	1. "My mother was my first role model. She started a food business from home when my father passed away. I learnt everything by helping her." 2. "The person who started our cooperative left his high-paying job just to help this community. That inspired me to believe that social change was possible through business."	4

Source: Author's own work
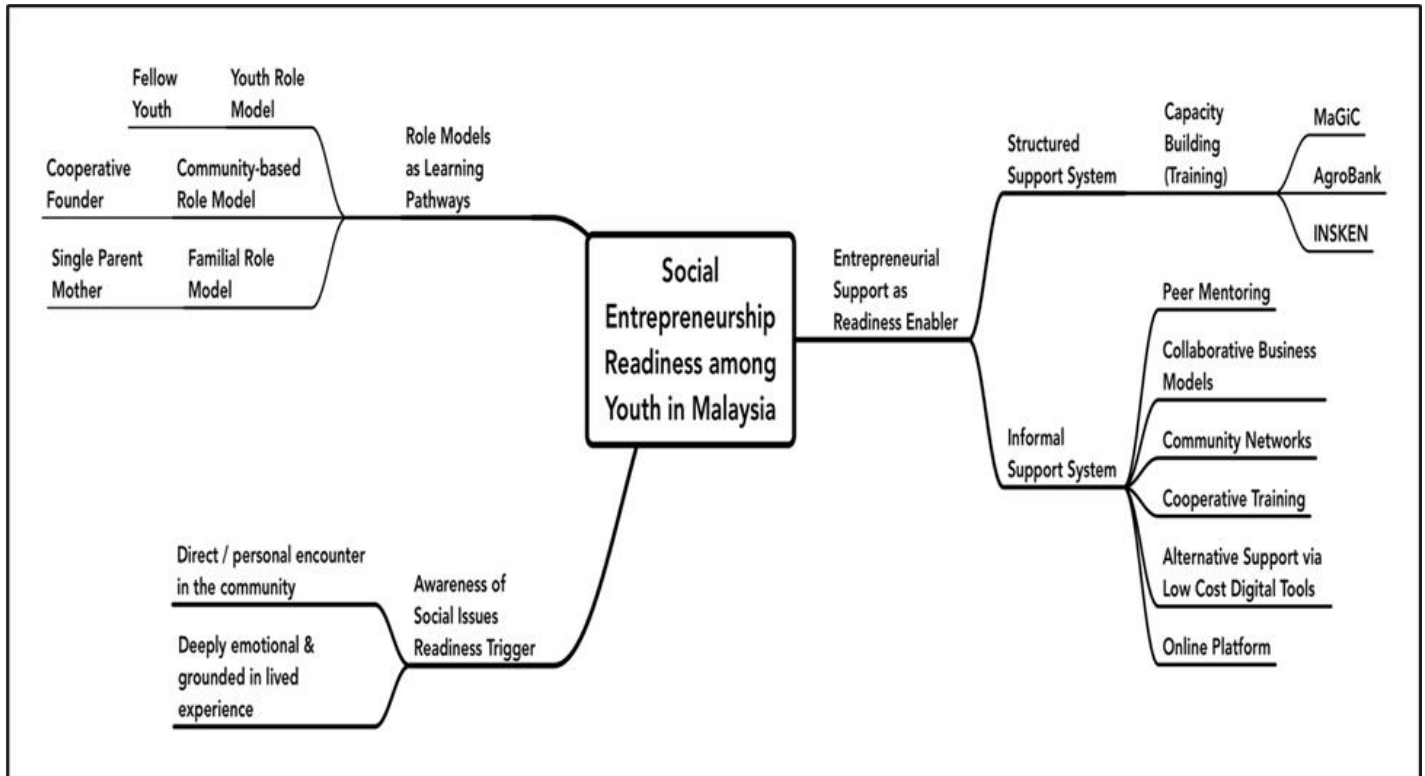
Figure 3 Mapping of Factors

Contributing to Social Entrepreneurship Readiness among Youth in Malaysia Source: Author's own work Detailed descriptions of each theme are presented below.

Theme 1: Awareness of Social Issues as a Readiness Trigger

Five participants recounted that their entry into social entrepreneurship emerged not from abstract ideas or formal instruction, but from close, lived encounters with pressing social issues in their own communities. This awareness was not the product of abstract ideas or formal study but arose from experiences charged with emotion, embedded in the everyday realities they navigated. One participant looked back on a childhood in a low-income household, observing his mother's struggles as a single parent, and described how these experiences forged his commitment to empowering marginalized women through skill-based training. Another participant, now running a food distribution social enterprise, traced her readiness back to early experiences of food insecurity during her college years far from home. These early experiences generated a strong, internal drive to take action. One participant explained:

"I had no intention of becoming a social entrepreneur. The situation arose when I observed that numerous friends and neighbors were unable to afford essential goods. That elicited a response within me. I was unable to disregard it".

This trend indicates that personal closeness to social issues can serve as a significant catalyst for fostering readiness, encouraging individuals to move from concern to action via socially motivated initiatives.

Theme 2: Entrepreneurial Support as a Readiness Enabler

It was clear from the participants' accounts that social awareness, though necessary, was seldom enough on its own to turn intention into action. Equally crucial were the formal and informal support networks that structured their efforts, guided their decisions, and sustained the progression of their entrepreneurial initiatives. The support structures include government programs, community networks, online platforms, and cooperative training initiatives. Participants emphasized that such organized activities; seminars, workshops, and structured training sessions provided by institutions such as Agrobank and INSKEN, are significant in their developmental trajectories. Others described gaining early momentum through peer mentoring and cooperative business models, avenues that required minimal financial investment yet fostered strong communal ties. One participant remarked:

"Upon joining a local initiative for aspiring entrepreneurs, the instruction extended beyond mere sales techniques. They instructed us on pitching, comprehending our community's requirements, and articulating our narrative. That instilled confidence in me."

At the same time, many participants pointed to the lack of centralized guidance and the fragmented nature of support, particularly in rural areas, as a persistent barrier to sustained growth. Yet these constraints did not simply halt action. Some participants discovered inventive pathways, turning to widely available digital tools such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Shopee. These platforms were not merely channels for communication but became instruments for extending outreach, cultivating networks, and amplifying social impact. One social entrepreneur explained:

"Our financial resources were limited. However, we had our phones and acquired the skills to promote our products on TikTok. Thus, our project expanded."

This account suggests that the challenge is not only one of motivation or initiative. It lies in the provision of support that is accessible, contextually relevant, and oriented toward community. Such support allows young social entrepreneurs to move from intention to action, to translate awareness into practice, and to navigate the material and social realities of their environment.

Theme 3: Role Models as Learning Pathways

The influence of role models, among them are mothers, teachers, founders of cooperatives, peers, is significant in shaping participants' engagement with social entrepreneurship. These figures were not merely inspirational; they provided concrete demonstrations of how enterprise might serve a social purpose. One participant reflected:

"My mother was my initial role model. She launched a home-based food enterprise following my father's demise. I acquired all my knowledge by assisting her."

Another participant recounted:

"The individual who initiated our cooperative resigned from his lucrative position solely to assist this community." That motivated me to believe that social transformation might be achieved through commerce."

In many cases, preparedness did not emerge from formal instruction but developed through immersive, experiential learning. Participation in family enterprises, mentorship observation, and community service offered practical lessons, allowing participants to internalize entrepreneurial values and build confidence through observation and active engagement. Observing role models who shared similar histories, values, or social contexts proved particularly influential. This pattern speaks directly to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which emphasizes that learning often occurs through observation, and that the effect is strongest when individuals recognize themselves in those they watch.

DISCUSSION

Readiness for social entrepreneurship, as these findings make clear, is not to be mistaken for a technical skillset acquired once and for all, but a socially mediated process that grows out of the intersections of lived experience, social support, and identification (Kolb, 1984). Awareness of social issues, for instance, arises not as abstract "knowledge" but through concrete encounters with inequality, hunger, and exclusion; encounters that impress

themselves upon young people and, according to Shepherd et al. (2023) and Bacq and Alt (2018), would generate both affective responses and ethical commitments. Yet such awareness is never evenly distributed, since exposure itself depends on socio-economic position, geography, and opportunity. Entrepreneurial support further complicates the picture. While Malaysia's institutions provide training and funding, participants emphasized the efficacy of informal networks; peer mentoring, cooperative groups, digital communities, precisely because they were adaptive, cost-sensitive, and culturally resonant. But here, too, lies a structural problem. These supports cluster in urban centers, rendering access patchy and leaving rural youth disproportionately disadvantaged. Role models, finally, reveal the mimetic and relational nature of readiness. To see "someone like oneself" act and succeed is to internalize the possibility of action, to strengthen self-efficacy through recognition and imitation (Bandura, 1997). And yet the same mechanism discloses its fragility, for where such figures are absent, pathways to confidence and competence can remain hidden or appear unattainable. What comes into view, then, is readiness not as an inner possession of the individual but as a contingent achievement, precariously dependent on affective experiences, on the reach of social networks, and on the presence of relatable exemplars. To ignore this is to fall back on an illusion that readiness can be manufactured by training alone when in fact it is the relational, structural, and cultural textures of everyday life that contour who can imagine themselves as agents of social change and who cannot.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study has shown that youth readiness for social entrepreneurship in Malaysia cannot be reduced to a trait to be instilled by schools or policy, but must be understood as a relational and situational process that emerges at the intersections of lived awareness, support networks, and the modelling power of others. The six entrepreneurs' accounts reveal that awareness of social issues arises not in abstraction. Support systems matter profoundly, but not in uniform ways; their impact is most potent where they are informal, adaptive, and culturally attuned, yet the unevenness of Malaysia's entrepreneurial landscape makes this uneven in practice; fragmented, urban-centered, and often inaccessible to youth in rural or marginal spaces. The presence of relatable role models further illuminates this relational logic: to see someone "like oneself" act and succeed is to make entrepreneurial agency imaginable, almost tangible, whereas their absence magnifies distance, producing a sense of impossibility. To see readiness in this way is to move beyond the simplicity of metrics and checklists, to apprehend it as a living field of relations to be nurtured, a terrain where institutions, communities, and individuals converge, and where the possibilities for action, the circulation of knowledge, and the cultivation of imagination are continuously co-constructed. For Malaysia, this perspective carries practical weight; fostering readiness cannot rely on formal training alone, but requires the careful nurturing of networks, mentors, and cultural narratives that allow social entrepreneurship to take root not only in urban enclaves but across the uneven, diverse landscapes where young people live, learn, and envision their capacity to effect change.

Recommendation

The findings of this study suggest that cultivating youth readiness for social entrepreneurship in Malaysia cannot be reduced to formal training or policy directives alone. It requires a relational and context-sensitive approach that spans institutions, communities, and individuals. Policymakers and government agencies such as KUSKOP, INSKEN, and MRANTI are called to recognize grassroots social enterprises as legitimate sites of learning and empowerment, providing simplified micro-grants and low-barrier funding that enable early-stage, youth-led initiatives, especially in rural and underserved areas where conventional access remains limited. Educational institutions, likewise, must move beyond classroom instruction, embedding experiential and service-learning approaches that situate students within real-world social challenges, foster empathy, ethical reasoning, and community responsibility, and link them with local social enterprises through internships, collaborative projects, and reflective practice. NGOs, incubators, and social enterprise networks shape these conditions by making possibility visible through relatable role models, the circulation of local success stories, and forums where imitation, recognition, and inspiration circulate. Readiness attains its fullest expression when opportunities, exemplary figures, and culturally attuned infrastructures are present. To cultivate social entrepreneurship, therefore, is less a matter of top-down provision and more an exercise in nurturing relational, contextually embedded ecosystems that allow young people to see, internalize, and enact their capacity to act as credible agents of social change.

Author Declaration

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