Enhancing Human Development through Social Entrepreneurship: The Case of Enactus in South African Higher Education Institutions

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Declaration

I, Crespen Ndlovu, declare that the thesis that I herewith submit for the doctoral degree Doctor of Philosophy with Specialisation in Development Studies at the University of the Free State is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.



10 October 2025

Crespen Ndlovu (2024928554)

Date

Dedication

To the dreamers, changemakers, loved ones
and social entrepreneurs, who inspire hope
and work tirelessly to build a brighter and fairer world,
may your vision continue to ignite inspiration
and create a lasting impact.

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Abstract

In a world marked by significant socioeconomic inequalities and skills mismatches among graduates, there is an increasing focus on social entrepreneurship (SE) as a viable pathway to bridge the skills gap and create employment opportunities, thereby improving graduates' self-esteem, dignity, and social inclusion. However, SE's potential to connect academic learning with real-world challenges remains underexplored, particularly its ability to advance the non-instrumental dimensions of education valued by students and graduates.

My thesis examined how SE, using Enactus, a student-led social entrepreneurial organisation, enhances human development among students in South African higher education institutions. My study is timely given contemporary development issues in South Africa and Africa. Issues such as high youth unemployment, digital transformation, a changing political landscape, and increased calls for global partnerships, among others, require a higher education that responds to these needs.

To comprehensively analyse students' experiences, I drew on concepts from the capability approach, such as capabilities, functionings, agency, and conversion factors. I also provide an interpretation using the five human development pillars: empowerment, participation, sustainability, productivity and efficiency, equity and equality to explore how students and graduates' participation in Enactus creates opportunities for them to think, engage and act in ways that impact society, extending beyond academic qualifications. This approach allowed for understanding the potential for participation in both the individual student's opportunities and choices and the potential contribution to broader societal development.

I applied an interpretivist paradigm, using qualitative methods to gather data through engaging with 55 participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 students from two universities, 18 Enactus alumni, two Faculty Advisors, and one Enactus representative. Three focus group discussions with 18 students, report reviews, and notes taken during the 2023 and 2024 Enactus national exhibitions and Indaba were also part of the data collection.

Three key findings emerged from the data. Firstly, SE fosters entrepreneurial agency, which is the ability to make decisions, take initiative, and create business ideas to improve life and create impact. Secondly, SE enhances student functionings, which refers to skills gained and social problems solved by social entrepreneurial action. Thirdly, student entrepreneurial initiatives

depend on conversion factors, which influence how people use what they have to achieve what they value. These findings highlight higher education's role in fostering holistic development through an experiential, socially engaged learning environment. The conceptualisation of entrepreneurial agency allows us to capture the web of engagement that shifts from an individual focus to a collective response when thinking about solutions. The link that holds together is the relationality of individuals in SE. All these can result in a transformative agency that might be useful in human development. It helps people take charge of their lives, make wise choices, and work together to improve their communities and future. It turns what people can do into what they actually do.

Based on the findings, my study offers a conceptual contribution through proposing the Social Entrepreneurship Capability Framework (SECF). I argue that higher education ought to evolve with the times to drive experientially oriented learning, fostering graduate adaptability to the complex needs. A higher education ecosystem that addresses inequalities, empowers graduates beyond their qualification, promotes sustainable innovation and encourages entrepreneurial thinking, which is important in sustainable human development.

Keywords: *Capability approach, Enactus, human development, higher education institutions, social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and capability framework, experiential learning. South Africa*

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Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BAB	Business Advisor Board
CA	Capability approach
CUT	Central University of Technology, Free State
EDHE	Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education
Enactus	Entrepreneurial Action Us
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HDF	Human Development Framework
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
POPI Act	Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	Social entrepreneurship
SECF	Social Entrepreneurial Capability Framework
SEDFA	Small Enterprise Development Finance Agency
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
TVET	Vocational education and training
UFS	University of the Free State
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

Chapter 1
Introduction and Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, social entrepreneurship (SE), a potentially transformative concept and practice that applies innovation to tackle social challenges and contribute to sustainable human development (Alegre et al. 2017), has gained global attention as an approach to addressing pressing development challenges. By blending innovation with social purpose, SE moves beyond traditional aid and charity models, offering sustainable solutions to issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (Gupta et al. 2020). Rather than focusing only on profit-making and economic growth, SE encourages inclusive participation and community-driven change (Drayton, 2002). This enables individuals to become agents of transformation in their own contexts, meaning problem-solving becomes more urgent than profit-making (Bacq and Eddleston, 2018).

Social entrepreneurs are often change-makers who identify a social need and build ventures, projects, or movements that directly respond to these needs, often co-creating these solutions through engaging communities in the process (Drayton, 2002). This framing aligns with the human development perspective advanced by Sen (1999) and Ul Haq (1995), which views development not merely in economic terms but as expanding people's freedoms, capabilities, and opportunities. Thus, this process was compounded into five pillars of the human development framework proposed by Ul Haq: empowerment, sustainability, participation, productivity and efficiency, and equity and equality. The categorisation of development dimensions in this view shows that, while profit-making is essential for sustainability, participation, empowerment, productivity, efficiency, and equity are at the core of human development. This resonates with the principles of SE and guides the theoretical lens of this research.

In this broader public and private sector context, higher education institutions (HEIs) are expected to produce graduates who are not only employable but also capable of becoming citizens who can make a meaningful difference in solving the social and economic problems that the world faces. In so doing, HEI will contribute to promoting inclusive and sustainable development (Walker, 2010; Walker and Boni, 2013). The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) reported that about 58% of people worldwide are in jobs for which they are either

over- or under-qualified. Lower-middle-income countries, especially those in Africa and Latin America, are seeing this trend. The report says the main problems are an old curriculum that does not keep up with the changing business world and a lack of connections between academics and businesses. Young people are increasingly pursuing degrees because they are seen as a signal of employability, even for jobs that do not require such qualifications.

Furthermore, the ILO report noted that "skills needs are not properly addressed through the education system and lifelong learning" (ILO, 2023:27). Addressing these requires a dynamic and responsive higher education system. Thus, SE emerged as a potential solution during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) of 18 April 2023 (United Nations, 2023). In resolution, the parties present believed that an embedding approach, such as SE, in education, policy and development strategies could contribute to sustainable development beyond economic and instrumental measures. This is because SE can create opportunities for experiential learning through hands-on projects. The hands-on projects can build practical, adaptive, and socially relevant skills through innovation, collaboration, and community engagement. By creating opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and community engagement, SE potentially prepares graduates for employment, entrepreneurship and leadership in addressing societal needs as the UNGA recommends.

However, despite growing recognition of SE's potential to advance sustainable human development beyond purely economic measures, its global adoption as a strategy for enhancing graduate skills and fostering social impact remains uneven. Various context-based extra-curricular programmes have been put in place to enhance human development. These include the World Bank's Skills for Jobs, which focuses on reforming curricula for work-based learning (Dibra, 2023). Also, the training, vocational education and training (TVET) strategy (2022–2029) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) supports the green and digital transition in lifelong learning (Parua and Yang, 2024:3). However, the outcomes of these strategies are yet to be realised and documented widely.

1.2 Study context

This study is situated at the intersection of SE, higher education, and the human development field in South Africa. Two public universities with Enactus teams that run community-driven projects were selected as case studies. In this context, Enactus served as a conduit to assess the benefits of SE initiatives in enhancing students' capabilities and skills through learning-by-

doing. Although the findings presented here do not provide a yardstick for the role of SE in higher education, they offer insights from participants that can spark a broader debate on how SE can enhance student capabilities. Placing the study in this context provides a practical platform for examining how, through SE, higher education can transcend a limited emphasis on employability and economic development to foster comprehensive graduate success beyond instrumental lenses and contribute to sustainable human development.

1.3 Problem statement

Globally, HEIs face challenges in today's rapidly evolving social and economic landscape as they seek to produce competent graduates for the labour market (Ndibalema, 2025). This is a concern: traditional measures of graduate success, primarily centred on employability and securing a job (O'Connor and Bodicoat, 2017), no longer capture the broader development of personal empowerment, social engagement, and critical thinking (Amundam, 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2021). All these capabilities are essential for navigating the complexities of contemporary global challenges (Walker, 2025), enabling graduates to lead healthy, educated, and meaningful lives beyond mere employability (Amir, 2025).

This concern is pronounced in South Africa, where the mismatch between graduate qualifications and labour-market demands contributes to rising graduate unemployment and underemployment (O'Neill, 2023). The 2024 national statistics show that 11,7% of unemployed youth are university graduates, reflecting a three per cent increase from 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Furthermore, during the 2025 State of the Nation Address,[1] the President of South Africa stressed that graduate unemployment and persistent inequalities are pressing obstacles to social and economic progress, especially in eliminating extreme poverty and inequality. Also, the goal is to reduce the national unemployment rate to six per cent by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). These challenges reflect a more profound disconnect between higher education outcomes and the skills graduates need to thrive in an increasingly uncertain society (Ranczakowska and Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh, 2025). Compounding this challenge are factors such as rapid digital transformation (Parua and Yang, 2024), shifting political dynamics (geopolitics) (Marginson, 2025), and increasing demands for global partnerships (Jowi, 2024), all of which necessitate a higher education system responsive to these evolving yet complex needs.

[1] Although the president noted that the youth unemployment rate (15–34 years) decreased from 45,5% in the third quarter of 2024 to 44,6% in the fourth quarter of 2024, it is still higher than the national average of 31,9%, suggesting a persistent challenge affecting both graduates and youths in general (2025 March State of the Nation Address).

To bridge the gap of skills mismatch and graduates living a life they value beyond being employable, there is a need to create a higher education system that broadens graduates' skills beyond their academic qualifications and being employable. This has led to the global recognition of SE as a catalyst for sustainable human development (UNGA, 2023) and as a contributor to global priorities such as SDG 4 on quality education (United Nations, 2015).

However, existing scholarships have concentrated mainly on the evolution of SE as a field (Dionisio, 2019) or on its external economic and philanthropic impacts (Al-Qudah et al. 2022), with far less attention given to the internal development of students themselves as a way to contribute to the global call of sharing and enabling environments creating opportunities for students to acquire capabilities such as critical thinking and leadership (Ragui, 2025). Consequently, a critical gap remains in understanding how participation in SE initiatives such as Enactus broadens graduate success by enhancing students' capabilities, agency, and functionings in ways that contribute to individual growth and collective human development.

This study addressed the aforementioned gap by proposing a redefinition of graduate success beyond the narrow lens of employability. It examined how SE, through platforms like Enactus, fosters leadership, innovation, resilience, and social responsibility as integral components of graduate success. By advancing a more holistic and sustainable vision of success, one that emphasises entrepreneurial agency and the capacity to drive positive societal change, this study sought to contribute both theoretical and practical insights into how HEIs can cultivate graduates who are not only employable but also equipped with skills and capabilities to create a meaningful, lasting impact in their communities and beyond.

1.4 Study objectives and questions

1.4.1 Main objective

To critically examine how SE, as practised through Enactus in South African higher education institutions, enhances students' capabilities and agency for human development.

1.4.2 Specific research objectives

This study had four research objectives, which are:

1. To understand students' perspectives on the role of SE in advancing human development in higher education.
2. To examine how SE initiatives influence the development of specific students' capabilities in South African HEIs.

3. To identify the factors that promote or constrain the effectiveness of Enactus in enhancing student capabilities within South African HEIs.
4. To develop a framework, based on the data, on how HEIs can capitalise on the SE outcomes for human development to achieve their sustainable development mandate.

1.4.3 Research questions

1. What are students' perceptions of the role of Enactus in enhancing their capabilities for human development?
2. In what specific ways do Enactus initiatives influence the development of capabilities among participating students?
3. What factors promote or constrain the effectiveness of Enactus initiatives in enhancing student capabilities?
4. How can the study findings contribute to understanding the role of social entrepreneurship in the contribution of higher education to sustainable development agendas?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is significant in three categories: academic, empirical, and practice, as explained below.

1.5.1 Academic significance

This study expands the understanding of how SE intersects with the capability approach (CA) and the human development framework (HDF) in the context of higher education. It adds to emerging literature by showing how students can develop key capabilities (skills and proficiencies), such as adaptability, critical thinking, and a sense of social purpose, through real-world SE experiences that go beyond formal academic learning (Ragui, 2025). These insights are relevant in an unequal and fast-changing society, which requires dynamic and flexible approaches, through which graduates need to have such skills and capabilities.

1.5.2 Empirical significance

There is a notable gap in empirical data on how SE initiatives such as Enactus influence the development of university students in the South African context. This study is significant because SE is increasingly promoted as a transformative pedagogical and student developmental approach in higher education (Urban and Kujinga, 2017). However, its impact on student functionings (outcomes) and capabilities (skills and proficiencies), as well as the

long-term development outcomes such as personal growth and wellbeing, remains underexplored in HEIs (Adigun et al. 2025). Examining the student and graduate lived experiences, this study contributes context-specific, grounded insights into the value of student-led SE to human development literature.

1.5.3 Significance to practice and policy

The study challenges universities to rethink graduate development through more participatory, interdisciplinary, and community-engaged learning models. These practical insights may help educators and development practitioners design locally relevant, student-centred initiatives aligned with the real-world challenges students face and, in the process, learn how to address them rather than being educated narrowly to be employed.

At a broader level, this research aligns with South Africa's development priorities and the SDGs, particularly in relation to quality education (SDG 4), youth empowerment (SDG 4, Targets 4.4 and 4.7), inclusive economic growth (SDG 8), and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Furthermore, the study provides evidence-based, student-centred views and experiences necessary for institutional leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen the developmental role of universities, informed by students as consumers and co-creators of knowledge. In this view, it supports efforts to build more inclusive, responsive, and transformative higher education ecosystems. Collectively, these dimensions highlight that the study is not only for academic debates but also contributes to informing policy-making on how higher education can meaningfully contribute to holistic student development, social innovation, and social impact.

1.6 Overview of the conceptual framing

Accordingly, this section provides an overview of the conceptual framing to lay the theoretical groundwork for the study. This is intended to help the reader examine the theoretical approach to the research through the lens of the HDF and CA. Therefore, this section provides a brief overview of the study's main ideas to help readers understand the later chapters. Thus, the HDF and CA form the theoretical basis of this study. These approaches provide insight into how SE may affect students. Sen (1999) proposed the CA approach, which changes the focus of development from economic growth to what people can "actually do and be" or their freedoms and capabilities. It stresses how important it is to give people value, or to help them exercise the real chances they need to live the lives they value. This allows an individual to understand what they value, and to identify systems that encourage such realisation and promote their actualisation. In addition, Mahbub ul Haq (1995) popularised HDF, defining it with five main

pillars: empowerment, sustainability, participation, productivity, and equity. These pillars are key to leading a values-driven life. They relate to the SE values, making the framework a good choice for examining how student involvement in Enactus can promote sustainable human development.

Thus, combining the HDF and CA was relevant for this study, as it allowed examination of outcomes beyond academic or job outcomes. Instead, it examines how SE helps people find their agency, purpose, and skills to deal with complex social situations. This theoretical framework allows the study's goal of determining and understanding how Enactus helps graduates and students grow by fostering student-led innovation and involvement in the real world.

1.7 Overview of social entrepreneurship in higher education

Globally, SE is gaining momentum within HEIs to equip students with the tools to address real-world challenges. Universities in Europe, North America, Asia, and parts of Africa increasingly embed SE into their academic and co-curricular programming to promote innovation, civic responsibility, and experiential learning (Iwu et al. 2021). In South Africa, this trend is reflected in the growing presence of SE initiatives, including selected institutions such as the University of Pretoria and the University of Cape Town. Organisations, such as Enactus, institutional entrepreneurship hubs, and development-focused student projects that respond to national imperatives such as poverty, inequality, and youth unemployment.

1.8 Scope and delimitations

This study was based on rich experiences from students at the University of the Free State (UFS) and Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) between 2023 and 2024. Also, selected alumni across South Africa who have been involved in Enactus since its inception in 2002 were interviewed. While geographically anchored in the Free State, a region that presents both rural and urban development challenges shaping how SE is implemented and experienced, the study maintained a focused institutional lens on UFS and CUT and how they impact and are impacted by the outside world, where these students and graduates live and work. The study did not evaluate Enactus nationally, assess its broader socio-economic impact, or assess the financial viability of specific Enactus enterprises across the higher education sector. However, it focused on understanding the developmental value of student participation in Enactus through the lens of the CA, offering a grounded, student-centred perspective that speaks to the transformative potential of SE in higher education, drawing on these case experiences.

1.9 Broader definitions of key concepts and terms used in this study

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this study, spanning human development with a focus on the HDF and CA, higher education, and SE, it is essential to establish conceptual clarity to guide interpretation and understanding throughout the thesis. The key terms used in this study were drawn from the HDF and CA and practice-based domains, such as SE and higher education innovation. Providing these definitions serves as the foundation for understanding how student engagement in initiatives such as Enactus contributes to capability and skills development, entrepreneurial agency, and broader sustainable human developmental outcomes. Although some of the terms have been pre-empted in the above sections, the operationalisation of these concepts is further elaborated in the following theoretical and methodological chapters.

1.9.1 Social entrepreneurship

In this study, SE is the application of entrepreneurial principles to design and implement innovative, sustainable solutions to social, economic, and environmental challenges. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which is primarily profit-driven, SE prioritises social value creation and inclusive impact (Dalibozhko and Krakovetskaya, 2018). In higher education, SE is both a growing pedagogical concept and a developmental tool to equip students to become socially conscious change agents.

1.9.2 Enactus

Enactus stands for **EN**trepreneurial **ACT**ion **US**. This is a global student and community-centred not-for-profit organisation active in 34 countries globally (Enactus, 2025). This includes South Africa, where it is present in 24 HEIs (Enactus, 2025). Enactus engages students in community-based SE enterprises, offering a platform for experiential learning, civic engagement, and skill development (Ragui, 2025). In this study, Enactus serves as the case study to explore how SE can enhance students' capabilities and hands-on skills beyond traditional in-class theoretical learning.

1.9.3 Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are post-secondary institutions, such as universities and universities of technology, that are legally recognised to offer qualifications ranging from diplomas to postgraduate degrees. In South Africa, higher education is governed by the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997). This act mandates higher education institutions to advance knowledge, human resource development, equity, and democratic

citizenship while responsive to national and labour market needs (Timidi and Okuro, 2024). The Higher Education Act of 1997, which serves as the foundational legal mandate for higher education post-apartheid, has been amended several times, most recently through Act 9 of 2016 (South Africa, 2017). These amendments have strengthened higher education governance, promoting social justice and quality assurance in teaching, research, and community engagement. Furthermore, improving accountability in public and private institutions aligns with the global changes and developments.

1.9.4 Human development

Human development is understood as the process of expanding people's choices, freedoms, and capabilities to lead the lives they have reason to value. This definition is grounded in the work of Ul Haq (1995) for the United Nations Development Programme, which highlights equity, sustainability, participation, and empowerment as central pillars of sustainable development (Mensah, 2019).

1.9.5 Capability approach

This approach, conceptualised by Amartya Sen (1999), served as the primary theoretical lens for this study. It focuses on individuals' fundamental freedoms to achieve valued ways of being and doing. Rather than solely measuring human development through resources or economic outcomes, CA emphasises the opportunities people have to pursue the lives they find meaningful.

1.10 Researcher's positionality and reflexive practice

For transparency, credibility and ethical responsibility, I declare that I am a former Enactus student leader and a social entrepreneurship academic researcher, which gives me a unique perspective on this study. This unique position gave me special access to the research participants and reports. Also, having been a student actively involved in the network, I have a deep understanding of the organisational culture of Enactus and a first-hand experience with students' SE experiences, challenges, and transformative potential. Because I had already been involved, I could connect with the participants better and understand their operations. With this position, I was constantly critical and self-reflective to avoid biases and subjectivity. This was achieved through methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involved conducting interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), report reviews, and taking notes

during the national Enactus *Indaba*[2] and Expositions held between 2023 and 2024. With the help of ATLAS.ti, I performed a systematic coding procedure to ensure the study was scientifically rigorous using reliable data collection and analysis methods. This is further explained in the methodology Chapter 4, where a detailed reflection on how my positionality shaped the research process, highlighting both the methodological opportunities it enabled and the challenges involved in maintaining analytical distance and rigour.

1.11 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into nine interconnected chapters, each contributing to responding to understanding how SE, as practised through Enactus in South African HEIs, enhances students' capabilities and agency for human development, by exploring perceptions, identifying enabling and constraining factors, and theorising a framework that could potentially guide how higher education can capitalise on the transformative role of SE.

Chapter 1 introduces the study by outlining the background, study context, research problem, objectives and questions. It further presents the significance, scope, key concepts, and researcher positionality, and concludes by explaining the overall structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 critically reviews relevant literature, starting by defining and conceptualising SE. It further provides an overview of SE's evolutionary process and offers a global perspective on SE in higher education. Lastly, the chapter provides challenges, opportunities, and prospects for SE in higher education.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the study. This is done by explaining the HDF, as conceptualised by Ul Haq (1995), which jointly framed the conceptual lens of the research with CA as conceptualised by Sen (1985) and further expanded by scholars such as Alkire (2010) and Walker (2022), Robeyns (2017). This chapter further justifies the theoretical choices by critiquing three alternative theories (innovation, social innovation, and human capital) and identifying their respective foci. The chapter also discusses how they fall short in framing this study. In this process, the chapter acknowledges that some concepts from these theories contribute to the study, although the key approaches chosen were HDF and CA.

Chapter 4 details the research methodology. It discusses the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative case study design, data collection and analysis method and ethical considerations, and provides

[2] An Indaba is a Zulu/Xhosa/isiNdebele word that refers to a structured conference or forum, rooted in African traditions of dialogue and consensus-building, where stakeholders come together to deliberate on issues of common concern to reach a unified resolution for progress.

a reflexive account of the researcher's positionality. This chapter presents an overview of how the data were processed and analysed.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical chapter presenting four selected Enactus social enterprises as examples of enterprises in which students are engaged. It provides descriptive and contextual accounts of the nature and goals of these student initiatives, along with their social impact within their communities. It also deductively analyses the potential capabilities, functionings, and agency developed in executing the enterprises. This chapter aims to contextualise SE to understand the following empirical Chapters 6 to 8.

Chapter 6 explores students' perspectives on SE, building on the setting established in Chapter 5. The chapter delves into students' motivations, experiences, and understandings of how student involvement in Enactus contributes to three identified themes: personal, professional, and social development.

Chapter 7 unpacks how student participation in Enactus develops critical capabilities, enhances agency, and fosters meaningful forms of human development. This is done by examining the core concepts of the CA, where functionings (outcomes), capabilities (what students are actually free to be and do), and agency (students' ability to pursue their entrepreneurial and academic goals and act on values they have reason to value as they engage in these SE enterprises).

Chapter 8 Guided by Robeyns' (2017) Categorising conversion factors, the chapter provides a synthesis of contextual factors into social, personal, and environmental factors. The chapter is categorised and reflects on individual, social, and institutional conditions that shape how students translate opportunities into valued outcomes.

Chapter 9 integrates empirical insights with HDF and CA to conceptualise the Social Entrepreneurship Capability Framework (SECF), which provides a conceptual model explaining how SE can serve as both an aspirational intervention and a capability-enhancing process. This chapter concludes by summarising the key findings, highlighting contributions to theory and practice, and offering recommendations for HEIs, policymakers, and future research.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Landscape of Social Entrepreneurship in Higher Education and its Potential for Human Development

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by defining and conceptualising SE. It further examines the evolution of SE since the 1800s, where written evidence of its presence and practice is available, although its origins date back to human civilisation. The chronological evolution shows how it has evolved, been practised, and conceptualised globally. Although much of the literature documents SE from a global north perspective, this chapter presents global south perspectives, identifying key scholars and organisations that contribute to this study and practice.

A global perspective on SE in education is provided, drawing on various literature and case studies, including Ashoka and other organisations in the emerging academic body in the global south, such as the Annual African Conference on Social Entrepreneurship (AACOSE), which are explored. In this critique, key contributors to the SE practice, such as Bill Drayton and Mohammed Yunus, are critically examined. Lastly, the chapter presents the challenges, opportunities, and prospects of SE in higher education. It should be noted that the literature reviewed does not offer a static account of SE; instead, it situates SE within the broader conversation of human development in higher education. It sought to identify gaps in understanding SE, mainly regarding student empowerment, agency, and social responsibility in higher education. This sets the stage for the study's theoretical framework, presented in Chapter 3.

2.2 Defining and conceptualising social entrepreneurship

Like any other multidimensional concept, SE is heavily debated and evolving in both the academic and practical spheres. This understanding resists a single or universally agreed-upon definition because it manifests differently across geographic, cultural, and interdisciplinary boundaries (Bacq and Janssen, 2011; Dees and Anderson, 2006). Scholars and practitioners have approached SE from various angles, each bringing a unique emphasis reflecting their ideological and institutional perspectives. For instance, Alegre et al. (2017), Drayton (2002) and Spear (2006) distinguished SE from traditional entrepreneurship by emphasising its primary focus on social good rather than financial gain. In contrast to commercial ventures driven by market success and profit-making, SE prioritises creating environments where people can flourish by addressing social needs through innovative means. Echoing this, Schumpeter's

(2017) notion of entrepreneurship as a "destructive, innovative, and creative", although presented from a profit angle, underpins the disruptive potential of SE to challenge societal norms and structures, while driving change through ethical and sustainable business models.

Adding to this, Bill Drayton (2002), widely regarded as the founder of modern SE, frames it as the domain of changemakers. He refers to social entrepreneurs as driven by a strong personal mission to tackle social problems through innovative initiatives, which aligns with Schumpeter's (2017) notion of entrepreneurship as profit-making. This emphasis on character and agency positions SE as both a mindset and a systemic intervention for collective, positive social change (Gabriel and Drayton, 2016). In contrast, Muhammad Yunus, often recognised as a leading SE theorist and practitioner, conceptualises SE as a self-sustaining business model in which entrepreneurs apply market principles to launch and sustain initiatives that address entrenched social challenges (Yunus, 2007:24). While Drayton (2002) and Spear (2006) emphasised innovation and transformation, Yunus (2007) grounded SE within the practicalities of economic sustainability and institutional structure. However, both scholars emphasised social impact as a key driver of sustainable SE practices.

Despite these different definitions, a common thread emerged: SE functions as both a model, a structured, replicable approach to problem-solving and a practice, a lived, context-sensitive intervention rooted in ethics, inclusivity, and sustainability. As Devi and Reddy (2019) and Martin and Osberg (2007) argued that SE is adapted across geographies and cultures, applying entrepreneurial strategies to localised social problems while aiming for broader social impact. Such diversity in definition underscores the importance of tracing the historical evolution of SE to appreciate how it acquired its current multidimensional role.

2.3 Why social entrepreneurship matters in higher education

Social entrepreneurship is crucial in the HE space, not as a substitute for its fundamental responsibilities of teaching and public engagement, but as a means to enhance and realign these functions in response to modern developmental challenges. Social entrepreneurship offers a systematic educational and institutional framework that enables universities to transform disciplinary knowledge into socially beneficial outcomes, empowering students to apply their learning to real-world problem-solving, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement (Adigun, Mpofu, and Maphalala, 2025). In addition to resolving skills mismatches, SE enhances universities' public engagement by establishing reciprocal partnerships with communities, industry, and the public sector, thereby redefining universities as co-producers of development rather than mere transmitters of knowledge (Al-Qudah et al., 2022). In contexts of inequality,

unemployment as recoded in Stats SA (2025), and limited public resources, SE enables higher education institutions to meet their societal obligations by enhancing students' capacities for innovation, leadership, and collective action, while concurrently creating social value in accordance with their social impact contributions and sustainability objectives. In this context, SE is not an adjunct to higher education, but a strategic avenue through which pedagogical excellence and public engagement are rendered developmentally pertinent, impactful, and forward-looking.

This study presents SE in higher education not as a critique of the university's fundamental responsibilities of teaching and public engagement, but as a response to the well-documented constraints in the traditional realisation of these responsibilities. Scholarships in higher education have consistently emphasised the prevalence of transmissive and discipline-specific pedagogies, with a peripheral status for public engagement, and a narrow understanding of graduate success that prioritises employability over agency, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility (Bauman and Lucy, 2021). The aforementioned concerns, prominently featured in educational and policy discussions, elucidate the rationale behind the rising significance of SE in universities for engaged teaching and training (Corbin and Thomas, 2023; Brock and Kim, 2008). In this context, SE is primarily understood as a pedagogical method implemented through public engagement. Its primary contribution is transforming teaching and learning by integrating experiential, problem-based, and reflective learning within authentic local contexts, facilitated through collaborations with communities, industry, and the public sector. This perspective prevents SE from being reduced to mere outreach or voluntary involvement, but firmly establishes it within the fundamental academic objectives of higher education.

2.4 Evolution of social entrepreneurship: A chronological analysis

Despite these different views and timelines offered by multiple scholars, there are various arguments regarding the origin of SE. What is critical about its modern emergence is acknowledging the arguments raised by Nicholls (2008) and Trivedi (2010), while SE is arguably a new term, its core principles, which combine business with social mission, are traceable to the beginning of human civilisation. Thus, in essence, the growth of SE is closely linked to larger changes in society and the economy, as well as to changing ideas about how businesses should help solve social problems. As noted in the above section, SE has been shaped by many scholars and practitioners, from small-scale projects to global policy frameworks. Notable scholars such as Drayton (Ashoka, 2018) and Yunus (2004) have significantly impacted its practice. Still, SE's growth has gained greater support in academia

and policy. It was recently officially recognised by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as a potential approach to address poverty, inequality, and other social ills through the social and solidarity economy (SSE)[3] (García-González and Ramírez-Montoya, 2021; United Nations, 2022, 2023).

Table 2.1 provides examples of key contributors, the conceptual shift, and a summary of the seven phases of SE development since 1800. Although the SE principle can be traced back to human existence, and the term SE was popularised in the twentieth century, this study sought to start in the nineteenth century, with the recorded recognition of its practice. Table 2.1 shows how key contributors shaped the evolving conceptual foundations of SE across different historical periods through the 1800s. Although the seven phases of SE are presented in chronological order, it is essential to acknowledge that they may have overlapped in practice. However, this linear presentation is drawn from various literature sources and developed to illustrate the continuous and evolving nature of SE as a concept, approach, and practice across different historical and institutional contexts.

[3] SSE is about "economies with a social purpose", where production, exchange, and consumption are organised to serve people and communities rather than solely focusing on profit maximisation, combining principles of unity, mutual support, and shared responsibility, trust, fairness, mutual obligation, and sustainability.

Table 2.1 Key milestones and conceptual shifts in the evolution of social entrepreneurship

Period	Milestone/Development	Examples of key contributors/actors	Conceptual shifts/Impact
1800s–1900*	Philanthropic roots and early cooperatives.	Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and the European cooperative movements.	Integration of charity and business.
1940–1970s	Proliferation of non-governmental organisations and community development.	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (1942), Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (1945), European cooperatives.	Social mission with sustainability.
1980s	Social entrepreneurship as a strategic business model.	Ashoka (Bill Drayton), Grameen Bank (Muhammad Yunus).	Changemakers and scaling innovation through enterprise.
1990s	Global academic interest and research growth.	Harvard, Duke Centre for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, Oxford (Skoll Centre), Stanford Social Innovation Review, Schwab Foundation	Academic legitimacy and theoretical expansion.
2000s	Interdisciplinary expansion and rise in research.	Santos, Dacin et al., Zahra and Wright, Schaltegger et al., and academic institutions globally.	Multidisciplinary approaches to social change.
2010–2022	Environmental, social, and governance hybrid models and policy influence.	International Labour Organisation, United Nations General Assembly (2023), and corporations (e.g., Walmart, Toyota, Samsung).	Blending social entrepreneurship with profit, purpose, and policy.
2023	Global recognition as policy resolution, promotion of practice, and research.	International Labour Organisation, United Nations General Assembly, African Network for Social Entrepreneurship Scholars, Africa Conference on Social Entrepreneurship.	Social entrepreneurship is institutionalised in global policy and continues to be researched and practised.

*This study considered literature that traces social entrepreneurship (SE) practices from the 1800s, where written records are available. However, the underlying principles of SE can be located much earlier, in the foundations of human civilisation, which relied on cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity. Practices such as reciprocity, sharing food, tools, protection, and collective problem-solving reflect the roots of community-driven enterprise. The table provides a lengthy period to analyse its evolution and practice to its current state.

2.4.1 Philanthropic roots and early cooperatives (1800s–1900s)

For this study, the origins of SE are traced back to the 1800s, when various authors converged, and the recording of SE principles began. Gupta et al. (2020) argued that SE began with philanthropic and cooperative movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The literature has acknowledged that during this period, the roles of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, who supported libraries, education, and public welfare through wealth accumulation and philanthropy, were key (Carroll et al. 2012; Kelley, 2004). At the same time, European cooperative enterprises were formed to meet the economic and social needs of the poor (Amundam, 2019; Defourny and Nyssens, 2008). Although not social enterprises, these organisations promoted business sustainability and community welfare. Their legacy shaped the structural and value-based foundations of SE.

2.4.2 Non-governmental organisation proliferation and community development (1940s–1970s)

Soon after World War II, the literature recorded a proliferation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focused on post-war reconstruction and poverty alleviation (Lewis, 2014; Lewis et al. 2020). For instance, the global north established the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam) in 1942. This followed the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE)[4] in 1945. These two NGOs were instrumental in the humanitarian response to global crises. However, over the years, they have transformed into impact-driven institutions that address complex development needs with measurable efforts in countries in the global south affected by droughts, famine, and other natural disasters (Thomas, 2010; Wieters, 2014). Beyond charitable aid, they moved towards sustainable, community-based development, aligning with SE principles. These organisations pioneered business-oriented strategies for scalability and sustainability (Kimball and Johnson, 2012). Although they did not self-identify as social enterprises, their mandates aligned with SE goals: reducing inequality, empowering marginalised groups, and encouraging self-reliance through entrepreneurship (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008).

[4] Arguably, the name has involved over the years. In the 1950s, it had changed to Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere. However, in the modern day, it is no longer an abbreviation but a name, symbolising compassion and global solidarity.

2.4.3 Social entrepreneurship as a strategic business model (1980s)

In the 1980s, SE emerged as a strategic business model rooted in philanthropy and NGO-led development, bringing a more structured approach that combined social mission with market-based mechanisms (Dees, 1998). Bill Drayton founded Ashoka in 1980 and identified and supported changemakers, entrepreneurs who used innovative business strategies to solve social problems (Arneson, 2018; Bacq and Janssen, 2011; Drayton, 2002). Besides offering startup funding, Drayton's SE model created a global support network that elevated SE from grassroots activity to leadership and innovation (Avelino et al. 2019). Similarly, Muhammad Yunus founded the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, promoting microcredit schemes that empowered women and the rural poor through offering non-collateral microcredit loans for small businesses. Yunus (2007:24) later defined this social entrepreneurial business as a "non-loss, non-dividend company that solves social problems". The developments show the growth and focus on solidarity and empowerment, which are key to sustainable development.

2.4.4 Global academic interest and research growth (1990s)

An increased academic interest in SE was further recognised during the 1990s. The formalisation of SE was witnessed as a pedagogical tool and a research focus at the Harvard Business School (Palmadessa, 2020). This period cultivated broader conceptual debates, developed theoretical models, and methodological innovation seeking to understand the multiple faces of SE (Mair and Marti, 2006; Mort et al., 2003; Bacq and Janssen, 2011).

In the same period, the emergence of the Centre for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE) at Duke University and the Skoll Centre for SE at Oxford helped mainstream SE in academia (Hulgård, 2010; Nicholls, 2010). The Stanford Social Innovation Review and the Schwab Foundation documented and shared case studies and best practices in SE to expand practical understanding and global reach (Bravo, 2016; Kirby and Ibrahim, 2011).

Despite these advances, literature from this period showed a stark North−South knowledge asymmetry, with most theory produced in the Global North, and the Global South underrepresented (De Bernardi et al. 2021). In this realisation, regional organisations such as the African Alliance of Social Entrepreneurs were formed in Africa, which organises the Annual Africa Conference on SE, aiming to strengthen networks and advance SE in Africa through practice and collaborative research. The African Network for Social Entrepreneurship Scholars, focusing on advancing research, collaboration, and knowledge exchange on SE in

Africa, also developed and shared contextually grounded SE models and research findings (Aina, 2013; Sengupta et al. 2018).

2.4.5 Rise and expansion of social entrepreneurship as an interdisciplinary discipline in the 2000s

Between 2000 and 2010, literature records SE growing as an interdisciplinary field attracting scholars from economics, sociology, management, and environmental studies (Dacin et al. 2010). In the literature, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a multifaceted solution to inequality, climate change, and social exclusion (Canestrino et al. 2020). Santos (2012) argued that SE corrects market failures by creating social value. Sociologists like Zahra and Wright (2016) studied the cultural and social capital dynamics of SE initiatives. Management scholars such as Cho (2006) and Smith et al. (2013) examined SE through organisational strategy and leadership. Sustainable entrepreneurship research by Schlekegger et al. (2016) linked SE to environmental innovation and policy reform. During this decade, SE became more multidisciplinary and institutionalised in the Global South, adapting models to local contexts and challenges.

A study conducted by Chell et al. (2010), as well as Doherty et al. (2014), highlighted the significant contribution of SE to job creation, fostering social cohesion, and aligning with sustainable development objectives. During this period, there was notable progress in comprehending and implementing SE models, as scholars such as Mair and Marti (2006) and Kickul et al. (2018) emphasised the significance of continuous research in tailoring SE to ever-changing global challenges. This period was pivotal in establishing a more interconnected, sustainable, and internationally recognised approach to SE, affirming its essential role in tackling urgent social and environmental issues.

2.4.6 Hybrid models, and corporate policy influence (2010s)

Around 2010, SE emerged as part of hybrid models incorporating environmental, social, and governance frameworks, expanding SE discourse into corporate, policy, and investment arenas between 2010 and 2020 (Eccles et al. 2020). Walmart, Toyota, and Samsung integrated social responsibility into their business models, while hybrid enterprises combined for-profit and non-profit strategies (Miazad, 2023). The review of hybrid business models in SE, specifically those that integrate environmental, social, and governance criteria, experienced an upsurge in 2013. Researchers such as Battilana and Lee (2014) have examined the distinct advantages and challenges of these models in effectively managing social impact and business goals. Similarly,

Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) explored the strategic and ethical significance of integrating environmental, social, and governance criteria into business operations. Their contribution further enhanced the hybridity of models of SE practice.

2.4.7 Global recognition and sustainable development (2023 and beyond)

The UNGA (2023) acknowledged the increasing influence of SE on worldwide employment and development policies. However, some resolutions hinted at the value of SE, especially at the eve of the Millennium Development Goals era. For instance, the UNGA Resolution 64/222 of 2010 recognised the need to develop entrepreneurship ecosystems for social and economic sustainability (United Nations, 2015). In April 2023, the UNGA officially recognised SSE as a policy pathway contributing to achieving the SDGs. The UNGA resolution on SSE set a specific blueprint, acknowledging the role of SE in the form of cooperatives, mutuals, and social enterprises that balance social, environmental, and financial goals and contribute to achieving the SDGs (Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono, 2020; Ndlovu and Lefera, 2024). Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) emphasises participatory governance, ethical practices, and community ownership (Dalibozhko and Krakovetskaya, 2018; Gabriel and Drayton, 2016). In this resolution, the United Nations recognised SE's maturity as a global development model; however, it highlighted the need for ongoing research, policy engagement, and institutional support. Importantly, this moment opened new SE directions in higher education. As institutions work towards the SDGs, the role of SE in shaping student capabilities, global citizenship, and inclusive innovation has grown.

2.5 Social entrepreneurship education: A global perspective

Globally, HEIs are continuously incorporating and formalising SE education in their multidisciplinary curricula and qualifications. The teaching and practice continually improve understanding of SE and help develop adaptive approaches to address various social problems in different contexts. These developments have further influenced the types of extracurricular programmes that harness SE potential to align with institutional goals for social impact.

Examples of universities that have introduced SE programmes include Harvard and Stanford in the United States, Universidad de los Andes in Latin America, and Oxford and Cambridge in the United Kingdom (Weerakoon, 2021). In Asia, examples include the National University of Singapore and the Indian School of Business (Liu et al. 2019). In Africa, universities such as Makerere University in Uganda, Lagos Business School in Nigeria, and the University of Pretoria and the University of Cape Town in South Africa offer SE curricula (Iwu et al. 2021). Although these programmes may vary in content and structure, there is a clear focus on social

innovation (Amundam, 2019) and on educating entrepreneurial citizens for sustainable social impact (DeJaeghere, 2017; Douglas, 2015). What is driving the growing acceptance of SE is its potential to equip graduates with skills and expand their freedoms and choices beyond a focus on employability (Gupta et al. 2020; United Nations, 2023). This wider adoption and its potential for sustainable development underscore the ongoing need for research to understand how it can serve as an approach to enhance students' skills and capabilities beyond institutional social impact goals.

However, SE education does not only happen within the walls of formal curricula. Several SE practices in the real world have reached various people by creating environments that encourage people to develop enterprises with impact and profit. For instance, Ashoka, a global network empowering social change leaders to live meaningful lives since its inception in 1980, has been a leader in creating, supporting, and connecting impact-driven women and young people and has since connected social innovators worldwide (Ashoka, 2018; Drayton, 2002). Its main programme, Ashoka Fellows, provides beneficiaries with financial, professional, and social support to grow their social enterprises and address overarching social problems (Ashoka, 2018; Sen, 2007). According to Drayton (2002) and Gabriel and Drayton (2016), the impact continues to grow as the network expands, reaching youth, students, and women in the most remote areas by supporting social businesses. Ashoka's vision of Everyone a Changemaker, loosely translated to "everyone is empowered to empower people around their communities and beyond (Ashoka, 2022), shows a dedication to making SE and innovation a regular part of society. Ashoka (2022) recorded that over the past five years, it has helped over 4,000 people in more than 90 countries to become changemakers, each of whom has made a real difference in the world's social and environmental conditions. Furthermore, scholars like Bardaa (2025), Bacq and Wang (2024), Dafuleya (2025) and Weerakoon (2021) argued that SE has excellent prospects of fuelling positive change and impact if it is continuously embraced and supported for sustainable development.

Along with Ashoka, the University of Oxford's Skoll Centre for SE is another example of how SE can be built into HEIs to make a difference. The Skoll Centre was founded in 2003 at the Saïd Business School (Chliova et al. 2020). The centre offers prestigious Skoll Scholarships and brings together young social entrepreneurs through its Skoll World Forum. This annual programme recognises successful individuals and creates a space for networking and collaboration for future impact (The Skoll Centre, 2022). These platforms help with education, research, and practice to address systemic problems, similar to those that Ashoka and other organisations are working on (Bravo, 2016). Like Ashoka, the Skoll Centre, while housed

within academic institutions, clearly records its impact over the years on its community beneficiaries. For instance, 91% of the Skoll Scholars have created social ventures, subsequently creating employment opportunities. Furthermore, 5,000 students have graduated from Oxford in courses and co-curricular offerings (Dalibozhko and Krakovetskaya, 2018; Gabriel and Drayton, 2016).

The global proliferation of social enterprise centres, such as Ashoka and Skoll, illustrates universities' capacity to cultivate scalable social business models that yield measurable impact. Ioannou and Retalis (2025), along with Kim (2025), indicated that these centres enhance SE's potential for social innovation and establish its legitimacy within academia, thereby aligning with the overarching goal of advancing the SDGs. Despite the focus on community-level outcomes, there remains a limited understanding of the specific skills and capabilities students can acquire through these experiences, which this inquiry sought to clarify.

As shown in the above examples, Many SE projects worldwide have adopted different approaches to solving social problems for positive social impact and long-term success across multiple settings. As indicated above, the HEIs continuously recognise the value of incorporating SE approaches into student development through inclusion in the curriculum or as co-curricular activities. This presence in the HEI setting provides an essential case for examining its potential to foster student development in South African HEIs.

2.5.1 Situating Enactus within the higher education landscape

Enactus, an acronym for **En**trepreneurial **Act**ion **Us**, is a global not-for-profit organisation that offers a collaborative platform for students, academics, and business leaders to co-create entrepreneurial responses to pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges (Enactus, 2022). The acronym combines the following:

EN: Entrepreneurial, noting the driving spirit of using business innovation with integrity and passion for impact.

ACT: Action, the willingness and commitment to do something meaningful with commitment and dedication to make it happen, aiming to create a positive impact.

US: A team with coordinated goals and aspirations, marking the key stakeholders involved, such as students, academic professionals, businesspeople and funders who pool resources together to enable students to implement enterprises with a sustainable impact for a better world (Enactus, 2023).

The meaning of the acronym highlights key issues that make the organisation relevant to fostering SE values. For instance, it shows that it mobilises students to use entrepreneurship as a vehicle for the collective good. Thus, combining innovation with action suggests a collaborative ecosystem of stakeholders supporting student ideas to drive positive change in the world.

Before its rebranding in 2012, the organisation was known as Students in Free Enterprise. The difference between the two was that the Students in Free Enterprise focused on promoting "free enterprise", an economic system that operates with minimal government intervention, in which market forces such as demand and supply regulate prices and production (Enactus, 2023a; Jumayeva, 2025). However, Enactus broadened its mission to reflect a global development focus, using entrepreneurial action to achieve inclusive, sustainable global impact (Walsh and Hynes, 2025). Ragui (2025) argued that the name change was a strategic move from promoting free-market enterprise to empowering students through entrepreneurial action for inclusive, sustainable global development, which echoed the Millennium Development Goals at the time and remains relevant within the SDG focus. Hence, the Enactus enterprise guidelines state that all student enterprises should contribute to one or more SDGs in their execution and practice (Enactus, 2023).

By mid-2025, Enactus operated across six continents, with over 2,064 campuses in thirty-three countries, mobilising more than 71,901 students and impacting over 11,6 million lives annually (Enactus, 2025). In Africa, Enactus has a footprint in North Africa, including Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. In East Africa, Kenya has campus teams, with Tanzania appearing not as a host but in collaborative enterprises with teams in the United States. West Africa has campus teams in Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana, while Southern Africa has teams in Eswatini, South Africa and Zimbabwe (Enactus, 2025). This phenomenon, widespread globally and in Africa, suggests its potential impact on communities and students. It presents the need to understand how such presence, while empowering communities, enhances student capabilities and skills.

2.5.1.1 Overview of Enactus in the South African education landscape

Enactus was introduced in 2002 in South Africa, with its first team recorded at the University of the Free State (Tshokwe, 2024). The participating institutions and active students have grown over the years; by mid-2025, a total of 24 institutions[5] with over 1,800 active students were participating in various enterprises and community projects. These students had improved

[5] The number of institutions fluctuates, with the highest recorded number being 28 over the past 25 years, as some institutions sign in while others suspend their operations for various reasons such as institutional challenges and a decline in membership.

the quality of life and skills of over 5,700 beneficiaries (Enactus, 2024). However, like many organisations globally, Enactus was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw various organisational changes. These changes included a drop in student participation and engagement due to the virtual platforms, which were not conducive to hands-on, community-driven initiatives. On the other hand, adopting these virtual platforms introduced "smart" approaches to addressing community needs, such as virtual learning, online buying and selling, and the development of locally focused applications with global impact on communities (Walsh and Hynes, 2025).

These changes prompted a strategic pivot in 2020, which shifted from simply supporting community projects to enabling students to design and launch their enterprises (Enactus, 2022). This post-pandemic evolution did not diminish the impact on Enactus. Similarly, Ndlovu et al. (2024) and Walsh and Hynes (2025) argued that it expanded the scope of student development by prioritising youth entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Ragui (2025), along with Ndlovu and Lefera (2024), argued that these changes, referred to as the "Refocussed approach" (Enactus, 2022), encouraged students to go beyond becoming employable to creating employment opportunities through their enterprises. Additionally, students become capable of generating income and offering solutions to structural challenges, such as graduate unemployment (Amachraa and Maad, 2023). Although understanding how these shifts in practice affect student capabilities is needed, this evolving Enactus model of practice shows how the organisation responds to context while enhancing its relevance to the broader socio-economic development agenda in South Africa and beyond.

2.5.2 Social entrepreneurship development initiatives in South African Higher Education and other local initiatives

Until 2016, SE promotion in South Africa was fragmented and locally driven, making it difficult for institutions to participate due to the lack of a clear legal framework. While entrepreneurship (business for profit) has been taught in various institutions, Iwu et al. (2021) argue that selected institutions, such as the University of Pretoria, Gordon Institute of Business and the University of Cape Town, Graduate School of Business, offered SE (business with purpose) as a study qualification. In 2016, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) launched the Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) flagship programme to address graduate employability and create employment opportunities through innovation and entrepreneurial thinking (EDHE, 2023). This programme provided a nationally coordinated structure of student entrepreneurial ventures and coordinates entrepreneurial support.

This is in response to South Africa's pressing youth unemployment crisis, which has doubled to 44,6% the first quarter of 2025 (Statistics South Africa, 2025), and the need for more innovative and financially sustainable universities. Of these unemployment levels in South Africa, 11,7% were identified as higher education graduates (Statistics South Africa, 2025). These staggering statistics have been viewed as a skills mismatch (Gupta et al. 2020; Marwala, 2023; Morsy and Mukasa, 2019), suggesting that, while the country has improved access to education, there remains a challenge with the quality of graduates and what the corporate world needs. Habiyaremye et al. (2022) noted that these growing disparities indicate that soft skills such as problem-solving, networking, and leadership have a greater impact on employability than technical training alone. This could suggest a need for a pedagogical shift to embed work-integrated learning and support entrepreneurship, possibly creating opportunities for students to acquire these skills through experiential learning as part of teaching and public engagement.

Adding to the above, on 16 June[6] in 2025, the President of South Africa stressed the need for the government and business to lead in addressing youth socio-economic challenges through various integrated approaches. In his speech, the President noted the importance of encouraging entrepreneurship and government commitment to supporting TVETs to bridge the learning and work gap:

> "South Africa's young people deserve to lead lives of dignity. Unemployment is robbing far too many youths of this right. As government and business, let us continue to work together and do all within our means to empower young people to find jobs and create their own opportunities," (President of South Africa, June 2025).

What is critical in the president's expression is that the government acknowledge the need to empower the youth so they can live a life they value through skills development. Additionally, the President further stressed that:

> …this is why we are investing in vocational training. We have increased funding to TVET colleges and subsidies for operationalising new campuses. We place thousands of learners and graduates each year into workplace experience opportunities (President of South Africa, 2025).

It is important to note that academics and policymakers, as recorded in the presidential speech, understand that skills mismatch is the elephant in the room regarding South Africa's graduate

[6] June 16 is a South African public holiday celebrating and remembering the power of youth to drive social change during the Soweto Uprising of 1976, when youth stood up against the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in institutions of learning. The president's speech was recorded and published on https://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-needs-to-foster-entrepreneurial-culture-to-tackle-youth-unemployment-ramaphosa-2025-06-17?utm (Accessed 30.06.2025).

unemployment. Thus, commitment from educational institutions and government support can be crucial in addressing these challenges. While institutions like EDHE continuously build ecosystems to support entrepreneurship, HEIs require a transformative process that empowers graduates beyond focusing solely on graduate employability. Thus, SE provides a conduit that blends learning and practice, where essential skills such as empathy (Dzomonda and Fatoki, 2019), leadership, and resilience are nurtured and sought after in today's ever-changing world.

The founding principles of the Higher Education Act of 1997 position entrepreneurship, innovation, and job creation as core mandates of higher education (South African Government, 1997). Therefore, the emergence of EDHE might suggest a realisation that going back to the drawing board is necessary to restrict processes and improve human development through doing business with purpose by engaging students to think entrepreneurially. This move also helps students realise that academic qualifications alone cannot guarantee success, especially in today's ever-changing world. Therefore, venturing into SE creates opportunities for learning and developing skills necessary in the contemporary social and economic landscape.

Various organisations operating in higher education have solid evidence of the power of experiential learning towards skills and capability development, for instance, the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator and Rethaka Repurpose. The former has helped over 40,000 children and youths in Rustenburg by converting waste into valuable products, such as school bags and chairs, and by empowering women and youth (Kgatlhanye and Ngwane, 2023). The latter has connected over 700,000 unemployed graduates to opportunities through networking, partnerships, and skills development in areas such as retail and tourism (Graham and Mlatsheni, 2015). These SEs show the potential of SE (business with purpose) to improve skills, create employment opportunities, and address environmental problems, such as waste, by providing graduates with a model for learning with purpose.

However, in the above-mentioned SE examples, student voices are missing regarding how their experiences have improved their skills and networks, which is crucial for a sustainable economy driven by youth. This understanding could help restructure pedagogy and educational policy to encourage experiential learning, benefiting students and the community. Klenner et al. (2022) described SE as a human-centred approach to creating solutions to social problems through graduate upskilling to develop empathy, testing them for relevance, adaptability, and sustainability. Therefore, across all these processes, what is emerging is the need for graduates to develop specific skills that will enable them to use these approaches to create sustainable

solutions; hence, the need to understand, through their experiences, how they have been empowered to become changemakers.

Critically, literature shows that key contributors to SE are predominantly from the Global North, highlighting an imbalance in knowledge production, whereby practices long embedded in the Global South were not formally recognised as SE until codified by Northern institutions. This shows the importance of reflecting on epistemic justice, ensuring that traditions of solidarity, reciprocity, and community enterprises from the Global South are not merely absorbed into Northern frameworks but are recognised as legitimate sources of knowledge in their own right. This is important given the continued research and practice of SE in the Global South, as illustrated by key examples in the early 2000s (see Table 2.1).

Although SE has increasingly been integrated into academic programmes within South African HEIs (De Sousa-Filho et al. 2023), it is often positioned as an auxiliary function under community engagement or service-learning centres, without clear structures or specified student learning goals and outcomes (Sun et al. 2024). This framing typically results in limited attention to tracking students' development and the skills and capabilities they acquire.

2.6 Social entrepreneurship opportunities and challenges in higher education

Social entrepreneurship offers an excellent opportunity for HEIs to connect classroom learning with fundamental social change. Drayton (2002) argued that SE can help students develop skills such as creativity, empathy, leadership, and problem-solving while working on real-world issues. Furthermore, DeJaeghere (2017) argued that, when SE is appropriately incorporated within the university ecosystem, it can improve students’ chances of getting and creating jobs, which, in the long run, contributes to human development through promoting active citizenship, freedom, and developing responsible members of society.

However, the success of SE is not only about student interest or motivation. It also depends on other important factors, such as access to funding (Adomako and Ahsan, 2022), supportive learning environments (Hlongwane, 2022), flexible academic policies, and strong institutional support (Ragui, 2025). The underlying agreement across these studies is that SE works best when the university supports students' efforts that advance their development and contribute broadly to the community engagement and social impact mandates. Even though SE has potential, it faces many challenges in higher education. These include rigid university rules, insufficient resources, and the lack of clear strategies to integrate SE into university ecosystems, especially by incorporating it into student performance measurement (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Desa and Basu, 2013). Also, traditional ways of measuring academic success in

HEIs often do not incorporate SE goals, making it challenging to track their long-term value for student development (Raimi et al. 2022).

Although SE can potentially contribute to human development by enabling graduates to develop skills and capabilities, the extent to which students benefit from this experience remains unclear. Many universities still treat SE activities, such as those done through Enactus, as extracurricular or co-curricular (Ragui, 2025), rather than seeing them as a key part of education and progress. Therefore, this study's untapped understanding and potential make it crucial to understand what students value in these experiential opportunities.

The literature suggests that universities can leverage the potential of SE to enhance students' capabilities by creating enabling environments that promote policies, dynamic, flexible curriculum design, and development strategies that support inclusive, socially responsible education. This is important because it contributes to global calls, such as the SDGs (United Nations, 2015) and the 2023 UNGA resolutions (United Nations, 2023), for creating a developing world defined by empathy, collaboration, and innovative approaches to addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequalities.

2.7 Future prospects of social entrepreneurship in higher education

Marwala (2023) argued that as technology improves, environmental concerns grow, and stakeholder expectations change, the chances for experiential education, which SE is grounded in, increase in higher education. Similarly, Chowdhury (2025) noted that digital tools like social media platforms and data analytics change how enterprises are planned, carried out, and evaluated (Chigbu and Makapela, 2025; Hota et al., 2020). Thus, HEIs, businesses, the government, and civil society need to work together to create enabling environments that contribute to sustainable development by leveraging the power of modern technology systems (Bravim et al., 2025; Filho et al., 2025; Gigauri and Vasilev, 2023). Because of these changes, HEIs are continually pushed to rethink their role as partners in building sustainable ecosystems, not just as institutions of learning without practice or connection to the real world. This re-evaluation changes the way universities teach by emphasising hands-on learning, enabling students to gain real-world experience and learn essential skills such as teamwork, collaboration, and the use of technology to solve problems even beyond their physical reach.

On another note, the rise of design thinking involves focusing on people's needs, understood through their experiences and perspectives. It considers creating by understanding end users' problems (user-centeredness), testing and refining ideas more relevant to teaching SE, and preparing students to think creatively about solving global issues (Klenner et al. 2022).

Additionally, Vallis and Redmond (2021) noted that design thinking has opened new avenues for improving SE in higher education. New financial models bring in investors who care about making money and making a difference in the world, creating new ways for students to access economic and technical support for their business ideas (Urban and Kujinga, 2017). Thus, if coupled with adaptive HEI pedagogies and polices, these support systems can enhance scalable SE models that adapt to different social situations (Mohiuddin and Yasin, 2023).

The adaptive policies provide an important terrain for supporting SE, as attributed to the UNGA 2023 social economy resolution (United Nations, 2023). Furthermore, DeJaeghere (2017) argued that responsible entrepreneurship should be taught at all levels of schooling so that learners can understand the value of being socially conscious entrepreneurs from a young age. This section highlights the importance of qualities that come with entrepreneurial thinking, which is key to tackling the global graduate skills mismatch, especially when institutions focus on graduates' employability.

Although SE has been shaped by diverse global trajectories as discussed above, its relevance in Africa requires careful consideration of local histories of community solidarity, innovation, and resilience. Enactus, while significant, does not arrive as a saviour. Still, it comes as one among many vehicles through which students can translate these traditions into structured initiatives with measurable impact. As indicated throughout this thesis, Enactus serves as an example of SE's potential to improve graduate skills and capabilities. This offers HEIs in South Africa and the broader continent a platform to harness youth capabilities for sustainable development through cultivating experiential learning.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review shows that SE is dynamic and changing, shaped by different definitions, practical uses, and theoretical interpretations. Also, it was revealed that various levels of formality in the integration of SE in South African HEIs and worldwide. These levels depend on institutional priorities, socio-economic needs, and development goals. However, there is still potential to understand the role and implications of SE in HEIs, especially in the Global South, including how theory and practice fit together, fair access to SE opportunities, and the need for stronger policy support.

To contribute to these developments, this study aims to determine how SE improves students' skills and capabilities, primarily through student-run, voluntary platforms such as Enactus. This becomes important as there is little evidence of how SE programmes teach the essential skills students value outside the formal curriculum. Understanding students' real-life experiences

was central to this study, which contributed to the growing call for more student-centred, contextually grounded research into the role of SE in higher education.

The next chapter discusses the HDF and CA, the theoretical frameworks on which this study was based. These lenses were ideal for examining how SE can enhance students' development, including empowering individuals and improving their well-being, as well as for long-term goals such as transforming education and promoting sustainable human development.

Chapter 3
Theoretical Foundations of Human Development and the Capability Approach for Social Entrepreneurship

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the HDF and the CA as the core theoretical approaches guiding this study's understanding of SE in HEIs. Grounded in the work of Sen (1989) and Ul Haq (1995), these approaches offer a multidimensional perspective on human development that goes beyond instrumental measures (such as economic indicators). Lily and Sharma (2025) argue that an inclusive society is a pathway to sustainable human development. In this light, the HDF emphasises equity, inclusivity, and freedom, including access to healthcare regardless of economic status, participation in governance, and the right to cultural or religious affiliation without discrimination (Lily and Sharma, 2025). The multidimensionality of the HDF and CA frameworks makes them suitable for examining how SE contributes to human flourishing within the university context.

To contextualise the relevance of the HDF and CA, I discussed broadly how the two approaches support each other in identifying how HEIs can potentially meet the need to promote environments that support graduate skills and capabilities. Following this, three theoretical alternatives were presented: the innovation, social innovation, and human capital theories. The presentation of these theories aims to endorse the choice of HDF and CA, acknowledges alternative theories, and, however, gives limited attention to promoting HEIs in cultivating graduate learning beyond qualification for employment. The HDF and CA foreground what people can be and do, thus expanding what the above-mentioned theories do and understanding human development beyond economic measures such as employment and income levels. This is important in a study that seeks to examine the development of skills and the broader formation of student capabilities and agency through participation in SE, contextualised as Enactus.

This chapter unpacks how the HDF and CA potentially enhance and expand students' capabilities (opportunities), foster valued functionings (outcomes), and promote agency (the ability to act on what they value), for example, understanding the entrepreneurial skills and outcomes students develop as they engage in sustainable agricultural projects.

By conceptualising SE through the HDF and CA, this chapter provides the theoretical grounding for understanding how student-led entrepreneurial action contributes to multidimensional human development. It sets the stage for deeper inquiry into how SE

initiatives enhance student freedoms, broaden life possibilities, and potentially catalyse societal transformation.

3.2 Comparative summary of theoretical frameworks in understanding social entrepreneurship for human development

Before engaging with the HDF (Section 3.3) and the CA (Section 3.4) in detail, I want to clarify their relevance to this study. Firstly, it is important to note that they emerged in response to narrow understandings of development that prioritised economic growth or skills acquisition alone. Understanding that development is multidimensional and broader than economic measures such as income and gross domestic product, HDF and CA emerged and emphasised people's freedoms, choices, and opportunities to live lives they have reason to value, as elaborated in the following section. In the higher education context, the HDF provides a way to understand education as a public good concerned with empowerment, participation, equity, and sustainability (Walker, 2025), rather than solely with academic outputs or employability outcomes. Building on this, the CA complements by providing an analytical lens for examining how educational environments enable or constrain students' opportunities to develop capabilities, exercise agency, and achieve valued outcomes beyond employability.

Therefore, the two frameworks prove useful in this study for analysing SE in higher education, as they allow SE to be viewed beyond instrumental accounts of skills training for profit and for examining how initiatives such as Enactus create developmental learning spaces. This framing prepares the ground for the discussion in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, where HDF and CA are elaborated and applied as the core theoretical foundations guiding the analysis of students' social entrepreneurial experiences contributing to developing capabilities and outcomes.

While HDF and CA serve as the theoretical lenses for this study due to their emphasis on agency, freedoms, and multidimensional outcomes and opportunities, several other theories could have been used to understand SE in higher education. To give an overview, the chapter first presents HDF and CA discussed hereunder, as the frameworks of choice for the study. Furthermore, the chapter presents three alternative theories that could have been adopted in this study, highlighting their strengths, focus, and gaps, and justifying the relevance of HDF and CA. These frameworks and theories are presented in a comparative table that summarises their contributions to human development and their gaps, given the selection of HDF and CA as relevant to this study.

The theories presented here include innovation, social innovation and human capital. These theories offer unique insights, especially regarding economic productivity (Callegari and

Nybakk, 2022; Farrokh, 2021), systemic change (Purvis et al., 2019), and sustainability (Puthucherril et al., 2025), which are critical for reflecting on SE in higher education. The comparative Table 3.1 synthesises the core strengths and limitations of these frameworks regarding HDF and CA. The table also provides an overview justification of why a capability-oriented and human development-centred approach offers a more comprehensive and appropriate foundation for understanding the role of SE in enhancing student capabilities and fostering sustainable human development.

Table 3.1 Comparative evaluation of theoretical frameworks for the study

Component	Human development framework	Capability approach	Innovation theory	Social innovation theory	Human capital theory
Primary focus	Enhancing holistic well-being, dignity, equity, and sustainability	Expanding individual freedoms to live the life they value	Market disruption and technological advancement	Systemic change and social value creation	Economic productivity and return on investment in education
Unit of analysis	Individual and collective well-being within socio-environmental systems	Individual capabilities and achieved functionings	Firms, entrepreneurs, and innovation systems	Communities and social systems	Individual as a rational economic actor
Treatment of skills/ capabilities	Empowerment and participation through capability expansion	Intrinsic value of agency and capabilities; contextual conversion is key	Technical and entrepreneurial skills for market solutions	Creative, context-specific skills for addressing societal challenges	Skills as tools for economic growth and employability
View of human development	Process-oriented and holistic, it focuses on equity and sustainability	Development as capability expansion and choice	Growth-oriented – often economically framed	Implied – focuses on outcomes, but is a less theorised concept	Instrumental – human development as a means to economic gain
Personal agency and autonomy	Strong focus on participation, agency, and inclusion	Central – individual freedom and agency are foundational	Not central – emphasis on invention over empowerment	Mentioned – participation is recognised but not always deeply theorised	Overlooked – assumes a passive role for individuals
Suitability for HE context	Highly relevant – addresses student development, participation, and societal contribution	Highly relevant – fits with agency, empowerment, and inclusive learning environments	Context-dependent – relevant to tech-driven HEIs but lacks a social lens	Relevant – promotes co-creation and collaboration in HE contexts	Partially relevant – focuses on employability but ignores holistic growth
Multidimensionality	High – integrates education, health, gender, and sustainability	High – accommodates multiple dimensions of well-being and constraints	Moderate – may include economic and environmental factors	Moderate to high – acknowledges interconnected social issues	Low – prioritises economic outcomes over broader capabilities
Relevance to SE	Strong, deep alignment with SE values – inclusion, equity, and sustainability	Aligned with SE goals of empowerment, co-creation, and agency	Moderate – focuses on novelty but less on justice, equity, or agency	Strong – aligns with SE goals, though less focused on personal transformation	Weak – does not align with value-based or community-driven SE models

Legend: HE=higher education; HEIs=higher education institutions; SE=social entrepreneurship Author's own construct (2025)

While these frameworks provide important insights into skills development, innovation, sustainability, and economic outcomes, they do not fully engage with the multidimensional nature of human development, which looks beyond economic value, as this study sought to explore.

What this comparison shows is that HDF and CA offer a more comprehensive and human-centred perspective, focusing not only on what people achieve but on the fundamental freedoms, choices, and capabilities they have to shape the life they have a reason to value (Robeyns, 2021; Walker et al., 2022). This is important when examining how SE, through platforms such as Enactus, shapes students' agency, personal growth, and ability to contribute meaningfully to society. The alternative theories are helpful to some degree; however, they do not provide lenses for capturing the more profound questions of empowerment, equity, and long-term transformation central to this study.

Each of these frameworks will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent sections. This further highlights the rationale for selecting HDF and CA as the most appropriate approaches for understanding the role of SE in enhancing students' capabilities for human development in this study.

3.3 Relevance of the human development framework and capability approach in the study

Over the past four decades, the HDF and CA have been major frameworks for discussing issues with human development. Various scholars have contributed to expanding and critiquing Sen's philosophy behind these frameworks. Recently, scholars such as DeJaeghere (2018), Robeyns (2017), and Walker (2020), among others, have played a crucial role in expanding the understanding of HDF and CA for sustainable human development. Building from their scholarly engagement, HDF and CA have been understood as expanding human choices and potential for well-being, allowing individuals to lead lives they value. These frameworks emphasise individual and community empowerment, making them appropriate for examining SE initiatives such as Enactus, which can potentially cultivate students' entrepreneurial agency and personal development. By reviewing the intrinsic and instrumental functionings (outcomes) of SE in promoting human flourishing, the HDF and CA offer a nuanced perspective that captures SE's full influence on human development.

The HDF and CA provide a comprehensive framework for assessing the impact of Enactus on students' skills and capabilities. In his work on human development, Ul Haq (1995) prioritised individual freedoms, including participation, prosperity, education, and health. Sen's (1985) CA, further expressed by Robeyns (2017), emphasises agency as the ability to act

independently and make value-based decisions. The HDF and the CA allow a multidimensional analysis of how Enactus initiatives potentially equip students with unique skills or complement what they acquire through their curriculum-based studies. The evolution of the HDF represents a shift away from traditional economic development indicators, which value development through productivity-based outcomes and the amount a country produces in general, without considering how each benefits from these macro determinants (Nayak and Kachhi, 2024; Ul Haq, 1995; Welzel and Inglehart, 2010).

Over time, the HDF has evolved and improved in application, practice, and focus. For instance, between 2000 and 2015, the HDF influenced the development of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which focused, among others, on eradicating extreme poverty, promoting gender equality and women empowerment, improving mental health and ensuring environmental sustainability (MDGs 1,3,5,7 respectively) (United Nations, 2015; Yunus, 2004). As shown, these MDGs align with HDF's pillars, such as equality and sustainability, indicating a focus on addressing pressing issues in sustainable development. Although achieving them was a momentous task, Hickmann et al. (2023) argue that the failure to attain the MDGs provided essential lessons that led to the expansion of the goals to the current 17 SDGs.

Then, the SDGs emerged with a comprehensive, inclusive, and transformative approach, focusing on people's economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development (United Nations, 2015). Although this was seen as a revolutionary approach to human development, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 mentioned that only 17% of the SDG targets will be achieved by 2030. Conversely, approximately 48% of the targets exhibit minimal or moderate progress. In comparison, more than 35% have stagnated or declined (United Nations, 2024:4). Although the SDGs are seen as a detailed approach to addressing broader areas of human development, exemplified by the set of 169 targets, the failure to meet targets 10 years after their launch reflects the complexity and multidimensionality of human challenges. It can be argued that a blanket approach cannot address the inability to achieve the goals. Therefore, a continued attempt at decentralised, top-down, localised approaches is needed. Transforming educational approaches towards empowerment, sustainability, and equity could contribute to a just society by addressing inequality and promoting sustainability.

The HDF shows five[7] important pillars for sustainable human development: a) empowerment; b) participation; c) productivity and efficiency; d) sustainability; and e) equity and equality (Ul Haq, 1995). These pillars served as a reflective framework for this study. The following sections will detail these pillars, explain how they can be used to measure human development, and discuss their relevance to this study.

3.3.1 Empowerment

Empowerment comes in various forms, as argued by multiple schools of thought. This study reviewed personal, economic, community, women's and political empowerment as they play a key role in human development. First, considering personal empowerment, Unterhalter and Allais (2022) argued that it relates to becoming better in certain issues through learning and training. Amir (2025) took this idea even further, alluding that personal empowerment means developing self-confidence, self-awareness, and the ability to change oneself. Building on the above context, Azmat et al. (2015) argued that personal empowerment in SE involves developing self-efficacy, leadership, problem-solving skills, and an understanding of social issues. Furthermore, Avelino et al. (2019) added that it includes learning, networking, resilience, adaptation, and the identification of opportunities for innovation. These arguments build on the understanding of personal empowerment as changes in self-assurance, self-awareness, and confidence over time, which will be observed in this context through the study participants' reports. Understanding personal empowerment is vital in seeing the value of SE in HEIs as contributing to human development, because proponents of HDF, such as DeJaeghere (2018), Robeyns (2017), and Walker and Boni (2013), argued that empowerment increases individuals' freedom, choices and skills to live a life they value. In this context, participants' experiences served as a basis for understanding what empowerment meant to them through their experiential narratives.

Green and Haines (2015) noted that community empowerment equips communities with the skills and tools to work together to solve their problems, such as fighting for basic services and food security. In the context of SE, Wilson (2012) and Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024) described community empowerment as getting involved and helping communities see and address their problems. This process includes educational and skill-building programmes to encourage students, staff, and the community to work together and contribute to sustainable development (Amundam, 2019). Drawing on these definitions, this study sought to understand community

[7] While there are various schools of thought regarding the number of pillars within the HDF, this study adopted the five pillars conceptualised by Ul Haq (1995) and popularised through the work of key scholars such as Fukuda-Parr (2003), Moyer and Bohl (2019) and Sen (2000).

empowerment as the role played by students and communities in creating a better place where solutions to pressing challenges are co-created by students and the communities involved. This implies that upon students exiting and supporting these communities, the latter can become self-sufficient; at the same time, people will have gained valuable skills in working with communities.

The third aspect of empowerment discussed here is political empowerment. While it has been confined to the ability to vote and choose leaders, this study took an expanded understanding view, as it involved acquiring knowledge about governance systems and giving people more chances to make decisions, learn leadership skills, and get involved in their communities (Harris and Patton, 2019; Rimmerman, 2018). Additionally, Waghid (2024) argued that political empowerment is essential in higher education, as it encourages students to think critically and influence policy. Political empowerment extends to promoting participation, one of HDF's key pillars. Students participate in activities that enhance their awareness of policy and their rights to a dignified life. These freedoms and responsibilities enable students to fight for policy changes that improve their lives on campus and in their communities, showing that education extends beyond the classroom into broader struggles for justice and human development when students are allowed to design their futures.

Having political power also means using academic research to shape public policy and developing a global perspective to address problems that affect people worldwide (Goetz and Jenkins, 2016). This study examined how SE programmes in higher education help students become more politically active, more critical of development issues affecting their well-being, and develop their leadership skills, potentially giving them the power to create social impact.

The fourth aspect discussed is women's empowerment. Mirzabaev et al. (2023) describe women's empowerment as processes, opportunities, and platforms that enable women to gain resources and freedoms to participate equally and to decide on life matters affecting their well-being. These include programmes that empower both women and men to reduce gender gaps in higher education (Alam et al. 2025). Doing this creates opportunities and platforms essential for producing future leaders, women leaders, and innovators with collective agency to contribute to a better world for everyone. In addition, De Welde and Stepnick (2023) argued that empowering women in SE helps break down systemic barriers, enabling women and young people to have the same opportunities. Drawing on participants' experiences and practices, this study examined how SE programmes create opportunities for women.

The last aspect discussed in this section is economic empowerment, which is understood as providing people with the tools and opportunities to be educated and equipped with skills to

become employable (Al-Qudah et al. 2022). For instance, UFS Teaching and Learning Strategy (2019–2024) focuses on inclusive, responsive curricula, the development of graduate skills for job success, and ensuring that students can learn (UFS, 2024). Through these opportunities, the university develops graduate skills so students can pursue economic opportunities and improve their well-being. Furthermore, Donald et al. (2024) added standard of living and quality of life as key attributes of economic empowerment, including access to the means to acquire products and services to afford a life they value. Economic empowerment in SE includes opportunities to work on projects that generate profit, learn skills such as proficient use of technology, and develop an entrepreneurial spirit (Haugh and Talwar, 2016). While economic empowerment is an essential aspect of SE (Iqbal et al. 2020), this study goes beyond the economic benefits of SE for students in HEIs to examine the skills and attributes they acquire through participation in SE initiatives. This research will examine how Enactus students learn skills that go beyond what they learn in school, equipping them to help the economy grow while also improving their own lives and the economy (Iqbal et al. 2020).

The dimensions discussed above indicate that empowerment has many aspects, including personal, community, political, women's, and economic dimensions. All of these are important for human development in SE. The SE initiatives can help people and communities improve their skills and abilities by building confidence, leadership, and resilience. It is essential to view these dimensions as important parts of the study's results, which may emerge when considering how participants define empowerment and its role in their well-being and sustainable development.

3.3.2 Participation

Participation, discussed as the second pillar of the HDF, is essential for understanding human development and how it weaves with SE in higher education and human development. According to the United Nations (2022), participation is an essential part of democracy because it helps people take part in decision-making, share their ideas, and work together. Furthermore, Martinez-Vargas et al. (2022) elaborated on how participation intertwines with other HDF pillars. As discussed under empowerment, Martinez-Vargas et al. also noted that it enhances empowerment and social change. This is especially possible when taking part in activities that help create meaningful knowledge and decision-making processes.

In addition, Matambela et al. (2025) argued in their study of a rural community that meaningful participation enables them to make informed decisions for their well-being and take control of their lives. Fung (2015) noted that participation can vary across areas. For example, Rimmerman (2018) argued that it plays a role in politics through activities such as voting,

lobbying, and protesting, all of which benefit the community. Pickard (2019) alluded that participation in social settings could mean attending community events or volunteering. Zhou and Kaplanidou (2018) stressed that participation in educational settings could involve research, seminars, and discussions. What is important to note from the different views above is that participation could indicate that everyone involved takes a step toward specific activities.

As this study focuses on how SE enhances human development among students in higher education, it is essential to understand how students participate in SE projects to determine whether their participation contributes to their development. According to Steiner and Farmer (2018), participation should give people the power to freely use their rights and make decisions based on accurate information. It is also essential for promoting agency, meaning people not only understand their situations but also work to change them (Coy et al. 2021).

This study examined student-led initiatives that encourage participation, including students of all genders, academic levels, and faculties. The reason to consider this is to understand whether there are any implications of the involvement for students of different generations and study levels, and how this may affect the skills they can acquire in these initiatives. This will help us understand how Enactus enhances or constrains the development of students' abilities, skills, and knowledge.

3.3.3 Productivity and efficiency

Productivity quantifies output relative to input, whereas efficiency seeks to optimise production by minimising resource use and waste (Krishnan et al. 2020). The HDF redefines productivity by explaining how economic activities contribute to people's freedoms and capabilities. For instance, valuing all people's contributions to economic and non-economic activities, such as volunteering and knowledge creation (Lerner, 2018). This shift highlights the significance of adopting a human-centred approach to improve productivity, refocusing the concept to prioritise human skills and capabilities (Hanushek, 2019). This approach recognises that investing in education and skill development is vital for personal growth and essential for societal development (DeJaeghere, 2017).

The HDF's conceptualisation of productivity integrates innovation and sustainability, which drives SE. Innovation entails using creative ways to solve problems with fewer resources and on time, and reducing waste (Mensah, 2019). Thus, productivity in SE can be seen, for instance, in Barefoot College, which aimed at promoting economic empowerment, focusing on women, by providing them with skills and opportunities to generate income. This SE organisation that

supports rural communities through education and training, focuses on sustainable development and self-reliance (Heckman and Mosso, 2014; Montgomery et al., 2021). The training enables beneficiaries to introduce renewable energy sources to their households, thereby increasing the duration of productive time, especially for students with access to light for study. This further reduces the time devoted to conventional energy sources, such as the search for unsustainable firewood (Chatterjee et al. 2021; Krishna and Kummitha 2017).

This review evaluated productivity and efficiency by examining how participants' experiences show their initiatives in using resources effectively to maximise social impact and reduce waste, for instance, by looking at initiatives that recycle waste and microfinancing projects for promoting clean and green energy use, such as solar systems.

3.3.4 Equity and equality

Integrating equity and equality is critical to understanding how SE enhances human development within HEIs. Equity focuses on providing the support needed for an individual or group of people to be well off in life, like others (Braveman et al. 2018). Equity is about not applying a one-size-fits-all approach, but tailoring support according to needs and access. It seeks to ensure just outcomes in crucial areas such as economic opportunities, health, and education (Walker, 2025). Dworkin (2018) defined equality as providing the same support to people; for example, if a man is paid R5000 for a specific task, and a woman is employed for the same responsibility, she should be given the same amount. This is different from equity, which considers need but equalises access without acknowledging differences in social and economic status. Fusing these two concepts is indispensable for attaining sustainable human development, addressing systemic inequalities, and ensuring equitable distribution of socio-economic benefits (Arneson, 2018). SE initiatives in higher education play a pivotal role in fostering these principles. Understanding how students are equipped with essential skills to advance social equity and equality is important. This experience has the potential to be transformative as it prepares students to support or launch enterprises that tackle issues such as poverty and inequality head-on.

To understand how SE, through Enactus, fosters equality, the study examined opportunities that promote, for instance, education for all and "fair discriminative" (promoting equity) initiatives that support disadvantaged members of communities, such as youth and women, thereby addressing systemic biases. Such initiatives that customise support to meet individual needs, including mentorship for marginalised students and financial assistance for

underprivileged students or communities, will testify to how Enactus enhances equality and equity. Specifics involved the development of inclusive platforms, the reduction of participation barriers, and the empowerment of vulnerable populations to attain sustainable outcomes.

3.3.5 Sustainability

Sustainability refers to meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs with the same resources (Mensah, 2019). The HDF emphasises the critical need to balance environmental, social, and economic elements to promote sustainable development. Mensah (2019) emphasised the importance of balancing socio-economic and environmental aspects of human development to maintain sustainable practices. Social entrepreneurship initiatives take a comprehensive approach to addressing immediate social needs while ensuring long-term economic and ecological viability (Al-Qudah et al. 2022).

To understand how SE contributes to sustainability, this study evaluated enterprises and projects that foster environmental stewardship, recycling, upcycling and sustainable regenerative agricultural practices. Also, skills development initiatives such as training on establishing and managing the above examples should be considered. Understanding the scope and type of Enactus enterprises that address the given examples would provide a qualitative case study of how Enactus initiatives contribute to sustainability and equip students to be impact drivers.

The five pillars of HDF have been discussed above. The following sections review the CA concepts and their relevance to this study.

3.4 Capability approach

The CA developed by Sen (1989) is a normative framework widely used in development economics (Schumpeter, 2017), higher education research (Walker, 2022), and social justice (Chliova et al., 2020). The use of CA in different research contexts shows its evolution and contributes to human well-being and freedoms. Sen (1988) described freedom as people's authentic options and liberties in using their abilities. Alkire (2017) further emphasised personal autonomy and the ability to make important life decisions. When applying CA to SE in higher education, the emphasis lies not just on students' entrepreneurial aptitude but also on

their capacity to use these skills effectively in their personal and professional endeavours, benefiting others.

The conceptual foundation of this study was on human development. To understand human development, the CA provides specific elements, such as capabilities and freedom that individuals value, which then authenticate individual development. Applying the CA helps understand the opportunities students acquire and value through their engagement in Enactus. Furthermore, the CA helps understand whether capabilities (opportunities), functionings (achievements) and agency (drive) are enhanced through their social entrepreneurial endeavours. This will further help clarify how these opportunities, outcomes, freedoms, and choices improve human development. As argued earlier in Chapter 1 (see 1.3), the CA shifts the focus from assessing individuals based on their material resources to evaluating their abilities or capabilities to lead fulfilling lives. This approach underpins the HDF (Ul Haq, 1995). The HDF and CA place the utmost importance on individual autonomy in decision-making, considering multiple factors such as education, participation, and empowerment that enable individuals to achieve their desired outcomes (Al-Qudah et al. 2022). Robeyns (2021) argues that this perspective has fostered a comprehensive evaluation of societal progress and led to policies prioritising human well-being and enhancing capabilities.

3.4.1 Capabilities

Capabilities refer to the variety of opportunities, fundamental freedoms and possibilities that people have to live or achieve a life they have the reason to value (DeJaeghere, 2017; Sen, 1985). Contextualising capabilities involves understanding individual differences and acknowledging that people are different and that their needs differ. Thus, to achieve the same goal, they can use different resources to achieve similar outcomes because of their distinct characteristics (Alkire, 2005; Sen, 1985). In this understanding, the CA widens the range of development efforts by focusing on equity, thereby promoting tailored opportunities based on one's choices and aspirations. Thus, linking this, SE initiatives enhance capabilities that are relevant to entrepreneurs who creatively and empathetically seek to solve complex social issues (Brock and Kim, 2008; DeJaeghere, 2017).

According to Lumpkin et al. (2013), social entrepreneurs are leaders who consider cultural and subjective factors when making decisions and acting. However, SE initiatives in higher education are yet to be fully understood in terms of identifying the kind of capabilities students acquire. In contributing to this understanding, the study complements the United Nations'

(2022) emphasis on sharing experiences, supporting SE, and engaging in research to understand how these can accelerate the achievement of sustainable development.

To operationalise capabilities, the study examined how participating students have leadership opportunities. For instance, opportunities to manage teams and make decisions, to acquire entrepreneurial skills such as business planning, fundraising, creativity, and problem-solving.

3.4.2 Functionings

Sen (1985) explained functionings as the actual outcomes or accomplishments of an individual's life, representing the actions they undertake and the conditions they achieve. These achievements related to issues such as maintaining good physical well-being and participating in and contributing to community and political-social interactions (Al-Qudah et al. 2022). This concept is crucial for showing a fair and impartial society in which individuals, regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic status, have equal access to resources and opportunities that enable them to achieve a good life they value (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017). Functionings encompass the presence of resources and the inherent contentment and sense of accomplishment from engaging in meaningful activities (Sen, 1985). However, the achievement of these functionings is impacted by personal conversion factors. Conversion factors refer to an individual's capacity to transform resources into valuable results (Sen, 1999). Social conversion factors, such as policies that foster a sense of security and safety, and environmental factors, such as geographical location, also influence an individual's functioning (Byskov et al. 2023).

To understand how student engagement in Enactus enhances sustainable outcomes and valuable achievements, the study considered how their leadership roles have improved team and project organisation. Also, evaluating how, for instance, the conducted training and skills development initiatives could have improved livelihoods and how being an Enactus member has contributed to their academic success, if any. Using successes and failures, the study sought to determine how the lessons have strengthened their resilience, confidence, and ability to adapt to challenges. Inductive and deductive analysis of these experiences will provide insight into what students consider they have improved in their abilities compared to before they were part of Enactus.

3.4.3 Agency in the capability approach

Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) alluded that agency is crucial for understanding autonomy and decision-making. It plays a central role in the development process by focusing on the growth

of capabilities and on improving individuals' abilities, thereby promoting empowerment, participatory development, and individual potential. The study aimed to identify specific experiences that enhance student drive and choices to act. The agency emphasises empowerment, participatory development, and individual potential, which aligns with SE. It promotes wellness and fairness beyond financial success by considering social and environmental impacts. Agency emphasises the importance of individuals as proactive change agents in SE.

While agencies promote empowerment, participatory development, and individual potential, the study aimed to identify specific experiences that point to enhanced student drive, choices to act, and autonomy. To identify student agency, the study examined their ability and drive to take leadership roles in guiding teams and enterprises. For instance, the kind of enterprises they work with and what they sought to address; understanding the type of initiatives that provide innovative community solutions addressing issues such as food insecurity, youth unemployment, and energy crises; and analysing entrepreneurial initiatives, such as capacity building focused on training marginalised groups and entrepreneurial ventures that promote community development. These examples illustrate students' choices to act and their drive to contribute to meaningful change that fosters transformative human development. Conceptually, it is clear how the HDF and SE relate, but there is a lack of understanding of the practical link to SE, which the study sought to address.

3.4.4 Conversion factors

Conversion factors, as articulated within the CA, are categorised into personal, social, and environmental conditions that mediate how individuals convert resources and opportunities into achieved functionings (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). In higher education, these factors are critical for understanding why student experiences differ even when accessing the same programme. For instance, a student's motivation, digital literacy, or socio-economic background (personal factors) may determine their ability to participate in an entrepreneurial initiative fully. In contrast, institutional culture, peer dynamics, and the presence of mentors (social and institutional factors) also shape capability outcomes, as stressed by Wang and Yangjie (2020), suggesting that what it takes for students to succeed differs, based on their orientation, motivation and background. Such conversion factors are not merely background conditions; they are deeply entangled with power, structure, and identity (Walker et al. 2022), affecting how SE can contribute to human development outcomes such as empowerment and sustainable practices. Therefore, assessing SE programmes through a capability lens requires

attention to the opportunities available and the nuanced conditions that enable students to benefit from them.

Recent scholarship, such as that by Pyvis (2011), Fauchald (2025), Guo and Liem (2025), and Walker and Boni (2020), calls for more context-sensitive analyses of how conversion factors operate across diverse educational settings and student demographics. Thus, to understand how SE enhances human development in higher education, research should investigate which conversion factors facilitate or constrain capability expansion, especially among diverse groups, such as historically disadvantaged groups.

3.5 Justifying the theoretical choice: Reflections on alternatives

The above sections focused on explaining HDF and CA, the frameworks of choice for this study. This section shows the breadth of theory engagement in this study. It presents three alternative theories – innovation theory, social innovation theory, and human capital theory – that were considered to frame this study; however, due to various limitations discussed below, they became less applicable. While these three theories did not fit the frame of this study, they provide critical insights into how the understanding of SE can be further explored in higher education.

3.5.1 Innovation theory

The innovation theory, propounded by Joseph Schumpeter in 1911 (Callegari and Nybakk, 2022; Farrokh, 2021; Schumpeter, 2017), emphasises the role of innovation in economic development. Henrekson et al. (2024) argued that innovation theory clusters innovation into four dimensions: product, process, organisational, and market innovations. In product innovation, entrepreneurs constantly develop new products and services to meet growing customer and systemic demands (Qasim et al. 2025). For instance, entrepreneurs may seek to continually develop environmentally friendly solar-powered automobiles rather than petrol- or diesel-powered ones. Second, it focuses on process innovation, in which businesses invest in optimising production methods to increase productivity and efficiency, for instance, by using robots for repetitive tasks (Farrokh, 2021). Third, organisational innovation focuses on building new business models, such as subscription-based models (Loanid and Lliescu, 2025), that enable users to pay regularly for products or services, such as subscribers to DSTV and Netflix platforms. Lastly, market innovation focuses on creating and reaching new markets (Anderson and Gatignon, 2025); for instance, Chari and Ferreira (2025) use a case study of Tesla, an automobile company, which has established manufacturing plants in their new markets.

Furthermore, Henrekson et al. (2024) presented how it tailors its products (vehicles) to local specifications, such as smaller electric cars for densely populated urban areas.

Even though innovation theory focuses on how technological breakthroughs, market disruptions, and competition drive economic and systemic progress, it does not explain how these dimensions of economic progress contribute to multidimensional human development. Because it is primarily concerned with economic growth and technological progress, it pays little attention to improving people's skills, such as personal agency, lifelong learning, and meaningful participation. The theory focuses on delivering new products and services to the market without considering how these developments contribute to access, equity, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.

Hidalgo et al. (2024) argued that SE considers innovation to be the driver of socio-economic progress; however, compared to the objectives of the innovation theory, SE goes further by promoting innovation with social purpose, where innovative solutions are developed to fit different situations and solve critical social problems. Social entrepreneurship emphasises impact and inclusiveness, rather than just a new innovative idea. Therefore, combining the HDF and CA broadens the focus to a more human-centred perspective, aligning with SE principles for human development.

3.5.2 Social innovation theory

Social innovation theory centres on the creation and implementation of solutions to address complex social challenges, highlighting collaboration, systemic transformation, and the fulfilment of unmet social demands (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). Social innovation theory stresses the importance of individuals, organisations, and networks in contributing to change through creative methodologies. These innovative methodologies aim to transform and improve existing systems, enhance societal welfare, and reduce inequalities (Purvis et al. 2019). Examples include collective, community-driven initiatives to address crime and poverty. Furthermore, advocating for policy change in response to emerging social considerations, such as issues related to gender and identity. As well as cross-sector collaboration in addressing poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability challenges.

This theory could have been ideal for this study if it had focused on human abilities and freedoms, essential ideas in the HDF and CA, which are crucial for students to develop as they face and tackle the ever-changing challenges in a complex world. Midgley and Lindhult (2021) argued that the theory expresses how critical systemic solutions are for solving social problems. Still, it does not look at how these new ideas can give people more choices, control, or opportunities to grow as individuals. On the other hand, the HDF considers holistic aspects of

human development, such as empowerment, participation, equality, equity, productivity, efficiency, and social inclusion, which go beyond innovation. Without including these human-centred aspects, the social innovation theory does not fully understand how SE can contribute to sustainable human development.

3.5.3 Human capital theory

The human capital theory asserts that individuals allocate resources to education, training, and skill acquisition to augment their productivity and income, thereby benefiting themselves and society (Becker, 1962; Sweetland, 1996). Kang and Mok (2022) alluded that the human capital perceives human capabilities and investing in knowledge as economic resources that enhance organisational and national development. This theory values human resources as drivers for economic performance and competitiveness by concentrating on quantifiable outcomes such as income, employment, and economic returns.

However, human capital theory is inadequate for analysing SE from a human development perspective, as it emphasises economic outcomes while overlooking aspects of well-being that are central to living a life valued, as expressed by the HDF and (Puthucherril et al. 2025; Vetrivel et al. 2024). By neglecting these multifaceted dimensions, the human capital theory inadequately reflects the comprehensive influence of SE on human development, which this study sought to capture.

3.6 Conceptualisation of the research objectives with the theoretical framework

Figure 3.1 provides a conceptual framework that shows the systematic interrelation among higher education, SE, and human development. This section explains the relationship between the components of the HDF and CA and how they will explain the contribution of SE to human development.

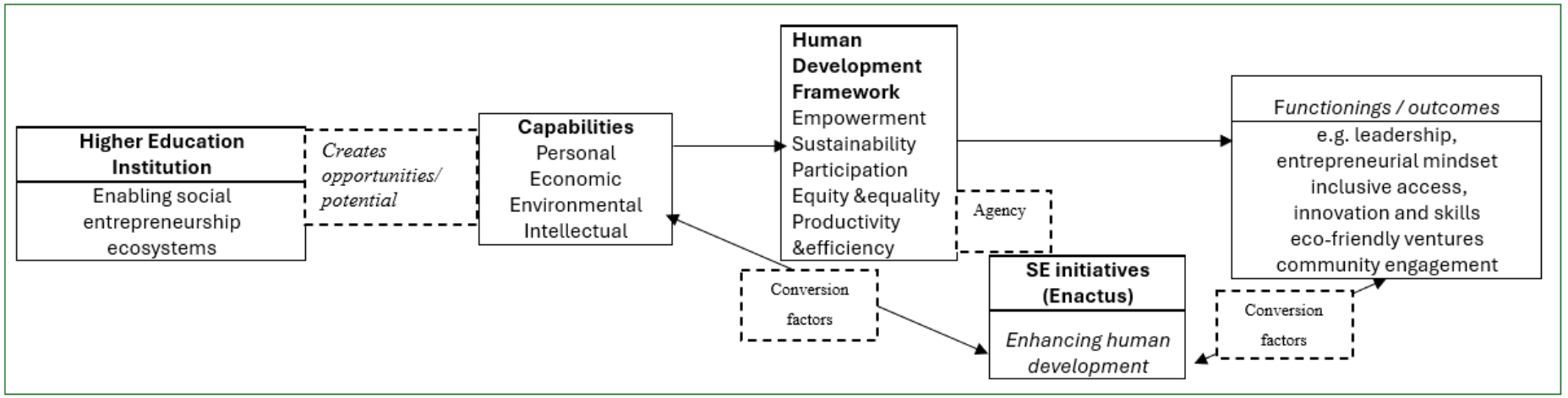


Figure 3.1 Conceptual framework of the study

Source: Author's construct (2024)

3.6.1 Higher education serves as (dis)enabling environment

Higher education institutions are foundational for cultivating an SE ecosystem where students can sharpen their skills through inclusive engagement (Roslan et al. 2022; Viswanath et al. 2024). Universities offer resources, platforms, and learning environments that enable students to participate in entrepreneurial activities. Organisations such as Enactus illustrate the significant role of higher education in generating opportunities and developing students' potential to tackle social, economic, and environmental issues. These opportunities include recognising student organisations within the university, allowing staff to serve as Faculty Advisors, and providing resources, such as internet connectivity, to help students work on their enterprises. The framework emphasises social entrepreneurial capabilities such as personal, economic, environmental, and intellectual development dimensions. The enabling environment provided by higher education fosters the development of these social entrepreneurial capabilities, which DeJaeghere (2017) presented as a key for enhancing youth livelihoods in East Africa. The HDF is founded on these cornerstones, encapsulated in empowerment, participation, sustainability, equality, equity, productivity, and efficiency. The HDF principles direct the transformative potential of capabilities into significant actions that promote human development, illustrating the influence of SE initiatives, such as Enactus projects, in advancing these values.

3.6.2 Agency and social entrepreneurship initiatives

The agency functions as a conduit connecting the skills cultivated in higher education with the execution of SE initiatives. This reflects students' capacity for self-directed learning (Adigun et al. 2025), decision-making, and leadership in significant, locally focused projects (Woods et al. 2022). Enactus serves as an SE platform that potentially offers students a practical way to develop agency in solving real-world issues (Tshikovhi and Shambare, 2015). This connection emphasises the significance of agency in transforming theoretical knowledge and capabilities into practical outcomes, advancing the study's objective.

Personal, social, and environmental conversion factors are essential in assessing the effectiveness of social enterprise initiatives in achieving intended outcomes. These factors influence how effectively students convert available resources into projects that translate into valuable functionings (outcomes). The framework emphasises outcomes or functionings, such as leadership roles and problem-solving, inclusive access, innovation and skills, environmentally sustainable ventures, such as regenerative agriculture[8] and recycling. These

[8] A sustainable way of farming that restores soil health, using natural means and improves the environment.

tangible results illustrate SE's influence on human development, highlighting the potential of Enactus projects to foster sustainable communities and improve both individual and collective well-being. Individual well-being refers to living a satisfactory life in which physical, mental, social, economic, and emotional health are valued (Gautam et al. 2024). In contrast, collective well-being encompasses issues such as shared happiness, community safety, health, and community prosperity (Uchida and Rappleye, 2025:172). These elements foster sustainable development as individuals and the community find peace within themselves, and life is seen as valuable and safe, enabling individuals and groups to flourish.

The conceptual framework explains the connection between higher education's enabling role and the tangible results of SE, highlighting the transformative potential of Enactus initiatives. It provides a conceptual basis for analysing the role of SE in promoting human development in higher education, which aligns with the focus of this study.

3.7 Understanding social entrepreneurship through the lenses of the human development framework and the capability approach

The combination of HDF and the CA provides a comprehensive view of SE, emphasising improving human well-being and expanding individual capabilities. These two approaches explain how SE develops students' long-term capabilities (DeJaeghere, 2017). This is important because the world is changing beyond valuing only economic performance and academic qualifications (McGreal et al. 2022). For instance, understanding how students develop empathy is lacking because SE studies have been biased toward understanding how SE improves the quality of life and standard of living for beneficiaries (Azmat et al. 2015). Shifting the discussion could help reorient higher education toward a more inclusive, experiential learning platform where students do not graduate only with academic qualifications but also with a set of skills and capabilities that enhance their social and economic contributions to home and society (Rauthan et al. 2021). The central point of convergence for these frameworks is that they all aim to improve people's self-determination tools (Avelino et al. 2019). For instance, the Grameen Bank, discussed in Chapter 2, provided an example of empowering women to contribute to their families' economic and social well-being. This implies that beneficiaries can control their pathways through a support system that enables them to achieve their aspirations. Following this example, the study unpacked students' perspectives on Enactus and how it enhances their capabilities in the ever-changing world. The Grameen Bank has promoted women participating in the economy by providing affordable microcredit facilities in Bangladesh. This has led to an increase in economic productivity and the ability of women to become self-employed and establish a life they value for their own

children (Yunus, 2004). This social enterprise exemplifies the significant influence of SE in changing lives by both promoting economic growth and improving individual economic and social freedoms. This combination illustrates the multidimensionality of human development, as orchestrated by the two approaches. The United Nations General Assembly (2023) advocated sharing best practices and highlighting how various social innovators enhance human development. Therefore, this study was appropriate for providing insights into students' lived experiences of the expected SE experiences in higher education.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter presented HDF and CA, and how they were conceptualised, to understand the significance of SE in enhancing capabilities and skills in HEIs. The study shifted the focus from conventional economic indicators of human development to a multidimensional view, in which development is understood to encompass individual and collective well-being, freedom, and choice. Through the lenses of HDF and CA, SE highlighted the transformative potential in enhancing personal and collective potential. The integration of HDF and CA provided a comprehensive lens for evaluating the efficacy of SE in addressing student quality and broader learning and development, contributing to the resolution of societal challenges and the development of employable, transformed graduates. To provide a theoretically balanced perspective, three alternative theories that could be used in the study were discussed, highlighting key insights and the study's shortcomings. This comparative presentation aimed to show the value of using the HDF and CA approaches for this study. Through the synergy of these theoretical approaches, the chapter demonstrated the potential of SE in HEIs to enhance students' capabilities and skills beyond formal academic learning. It offered a potential mechanism for cultivating global graduates capable of addressing pressing developmental challenges.

The following chapter answers the how and what questions to understand the role of SE in enhancing students' capabilities for human development, detailing the precise methods, tools, techniques, and strategies used to capture the impact of SE initiatives in HEIs.

Chapter 4
Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and methods used to understand how SE enhances human development in South African HEIs. The study is based on an interpretivist paradigm, which allows for the examination of students' lived experiences, subjective meanings, and social contexts in Enactus programmes. As case study sites, UFS and CUT were chosen because they each offer a different qualitative view of Enactus student participation. The first part of the chapter discusses the philosophical roots of the interpretivist approach and how it aligns with the study's goals. Then it discusses the qualitative methods used, such as document reviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). A purposeful sampling method was used, ensuring that all genders voluntarily participated. Furthermore, this chapter discusses institutional affiliations, academic backgrounds, years of involvement in Enactus, and faculty affiliations for students at different levels of study.

Ethical issues were upheld in this study. These include the use and signing of the informed consent by participants. Ensuring the privacy of personal information and complying with the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (hereinafter, POPI Act) were upheld throughout the data collection and analysis process. Furthermore, this chapter discusses how triangulation, reflexivity, and member checking were used to enhance the credibility of the study and its findings. The chapter further presents the data analysis process, which was done with the help of the ATLAS.ti data management. Lastly, the chapter shares the challenges and opportunities encountered during the fieldwork. This also included continuous reflection on how to be both an insider and a researcher simultaneously, without compromising data quality or participant perspectives.

4.2 Interpretivist research paradigm

This study used the interpretivist research paradigm because it acknowledges the complexities of human experiences and social constructs, believing that "not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted".[9] This quote by Einstein aptly encapsulates the philosophy behind interpretivism, explaining that in qualitative interpretivist studies, sample size is justified if it yields nuanced data that respond to the research objectives.

[9] Attributed to philosophy quotes by Albert Einstein, 1879-1955.

This stance contrasts with positivist paradigms, which emphasise objective truths in quantitative data (Avenier and Thomas, 2015). The interpretivist research paradigm is valuable for understanding the complex perspectives and contextual factors shaping SE initiatives in dynamic, ever-evolving environments, such as HEIs. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) and Altheide and Johnson (2011) contended that interpretivism enables examining personal experiences and contextual meanings of individual experiences to qualify for impact.

Maggs-Rapport (2000) emphasised the importance of understanding subjective meanings and interpretations within the study's context, recognising that these perspectives constantly evolve and shape diverse understandings of life based on individual experiences. Thus, the interpretivist paradigm became critical for enabling participants to articulate their experiences and contextual knowledge of their involvement in Enactus initiatives, assess how these activities influenced their capabilities, and determine how the SE ecosystem enhances or constrains their skills and capabilities.

4.3 Qualitative research approach

This study took a qualitative approach based on the interpretivist paradigm to investigate the complex dynamics of student experiences as they engaged in Enactus initiatives. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative research excels at extracting meaning from people's experiences and perspectives in their natural settings. This methodological approach was adopted with an open mind to enable the discovery of new insights and understandings rather than testing pre-existing theories and hypotheses (Priya, 2021).

Despite criticism from positivist scholars of interpretivists for the subjective nature of qualitative research (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020; Spencer et al., 2014), stemming from smaller sample sizes and interpretive analysis, this approach produces deep, rich insights. Such subjectivity, frequently viewed as a disadvantage due to concerns about reliability and consistency, was balanced by reflexivity and triangulation. I critically reflected on how my background as an Enactus alumnus influenced participant engagement. This reflexivity helped me manage potential bias during data collection and interpretation. In terms of triangulation, data were collected from different groups, including students, alumni, and staff, and reports were reviewed, providing a balanced perspective on the potential contributions of Enactus to human development. This thorough approach emphasises the unique ability of qualitative research to capture nuanced understandings that quantitative methods may miss.

4.4 Multiple-explanatory case study design

A multiple exploratory case study design was used in this study to provide a detailed, context-specific examination of how and why participation in Enactus may contribute to the development of student capabilities and human development outcomes in higher education. This design is appropriate for exploring the underlying processes, meanings, and conditions shaping capability development, rather than quantifying prevalence or establishing statistical generalisations (Oranga and Matere, 2023). The multiple exploratory case study design allows for treating Enactus as an instrumental case, enabling the analysis of broader dynamics of SE and capability development within higher education rather than examining it as an end in itself. The use of a multiple-case approach, drawing on cases from UFS and CUT, facilitates analytical comparison across institutional contexts, strengthening interpretive insight while remaining sensitive to contextual variation (Posavac, 2015). Anchored in the CA and the HDF, the exploratory design supports theory-informed inquiry into the personal, social, and institutional conversion factors that shape differentiated capability outcomes among students.

The Enactus students from UFS and CUT were purposively selected as study sites, from which data were collected from students participating in Enactus initiatives. These two institutions were chosen for their rich historical achievements in Enactus initiatives, both in community impact and student leadership, suggesting the organisation's potential for student development. According to a report on the UFS news website by Tshokwe (2024), UFS Enactus teams have achieved remarkable success in enterprise and student development over the past two decades, as evidenced by interviews with the Enactus representative and the reports reviewed. Although the students change over the years as they graduate and leave the institution, the university has represented South Africa three times between 2002 and 2010 at Enactus global competitions, where teams with compelling, impactful initiatives were showcased. Furthermore, records show that the team has received numerous accolades and achievements over the past two decades, making it one of the most impactful teams in South Africa (Enactus, 2024).

The second case study used was Enactus CUT, selected for its consecutive country representation at the same global stage in 2022 and 2023 (Enactus, 2023). The consecutive country representation provided compelling evidence of the innovative nature of their teams' enterprises, suggesting the potential impact of their enterprises on students and the community they serve. Furthermore, across both UFS and CUT, the mixed student body from the Qwaqwa, Bloemfontein, and Welkom campuses in the Free State province held different views on the

kinds of SE initiatives students were engaging in, their impact, and how these initiatives influenced students' skills and attributes.

The decision to explore SE through the Enactus lens within HEIs emerged from an interest in understanding how student organisations potentially cultivate knowledge, skills, and capabilities that support their development and community impact. Enactus activities provide a distinctive opportunity to examine these processes in practice. Analysis of the Enactus (2025) report further highlights the potential of such initiatives to reorient educational frameworks toward the development of socially entrepreneurial citizens, whose capabilities extend beyond narrow employability outcomes, as advocated by DeJaeghere (2017). This orientation is relevant in contexts such as South Africa, where persistent skills mismatches and rising graduate unemployment underscore the need for educational approaches that integrate capability development with social and economic relevance (O'Neill, 2023).

4.5 Population of the study

The study population comprised Enactus South Africa's 24 HEIs participating in Enactus initiatives (Enactus, 2024). These 24 participating institutions were characterised by students registered in multidisciplinary programmes at various levels of study who voluntarily joined and participated in Enactus activities. Each Enactus team member (student) participated in at least one team project or enterprise (Enactus, 2022). This ensured that every participating student had a platform to work with their peers, apply, learn, and co-create solutions to the pressing challenges in their communities.

Each participating institution had at least one Faculty Advisor, a university staff member who was voluntarily appointed and provided mentorship, coaching and guidance to participating students. Accordingly, by 2024, there were 53 Faculty Advisors from 24 HEIs, with each institution having at least 2 Faculty Advisors (Enactus, 2022). These Faculty Advisors served as the official link between students, the institution, and the Enactus country office.

According to the 2024 Enactus report, there were 1,044 active students nationwide. These numbers were reported to have been around 2,000 before COVID-19. It is further noted that the pandemic affected various enterprises that required physical participation and site visits. However, Omotosho et al. (2023) reported that the number of participating students worldwide was steadily increasing. In contrast, according to Ndlovu and Lefera (2024), these improvements were driven by growing graduate unemployment and the urgent need for entrepreneurial solutions, which some students seem to embrace.

4.5.1 Participant selection criterion and recruitment

Students who participated in the study were enrolled at UFS or CUT and were active members of their Enactus teams during data collection. The recruitment process began with a formal call sent to Faculty Advisors and the Enactus South Africa national office. This call was shared through team-based social media platforms on the four campuses of the two universities with Enactus teams. Interested students were told to contact me directly. Various participants shared their Enactus friends from the two institutions who participated in interviews and FGDs, thereby naturally increasing the sample size.

All included members were verified and provided with the time they were members of the Enactus team. Excluded members were those who would have joined the teams in 2024. This was to ensure that participants had knowledge of enterprises and had a story to tell about their experience. Also, some participants were identified by their peers and Faculty Advisors. checking to confirm with team leaders and Faculty Advisors that all participants were active Enactus members. This step, as highlighted by Singh et al. (2021), was critical in determining the reliability of the participants' contributions. Alumni participation was also verified by Faculty Advisors and Enactus South Africa, who confirmed that all alumni respondents were former Enactus members. This verification process was critical to ensure that the information provided was based on genuine, accurate experiences of Enactus students, faculty, and alumni.

The process of recruiting alumni was also planned. The alumni consisted of former Enactus members who had participated in any of the 24 HEIs in South Africa since the organisation's inception in 2002. This was to gather diverse perspectives, track longitudinal changes, and capture contributions. In 2023, I registered my interest in doing a study with Enactus when I was requesting a letter of authorisation. This helped me build relationships that strengthened my recruitment efforts.

In January 2024, Enactus South Africa held an Indaba (see explanation of Indaba on 1.10), an event that brought together Faculty Advisors and alumni. At this event, I met and spoke with more than 10 alumni who served as Enactus Faculty Advisors or worked as lecturers and/or university staff at 24 HEIs in South Africa. This event was beneficial for contacting willing alumni participants and setting up peer referrals. Through this event, I recruited 9 alumni interested in participating in the study. These alumni also actively helped me get referrals from others who were not affiliated with or working in higher education. At the same event, I managed to secure an interview with an Enactus South Africa country office representative.

This person had worked directly with students and their enterprises for over ten years. Faculty Advisors from UFS and CUT also attended and volunteered to take part in the study.

4.5.2 Sampling approach

This study employed purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used because the aim of the study was to recruit people with knowledge of the subject matter; both purposive and snowball sampling helped identify the right participants with knowledge and deeper insights. These methods were initiated at the Enactus South Africa Indaba in January 2024. This helped to identify potential participants who also helped with recruiting students and alumni. I acknowledge the risks of (i) sectoral/role bias (participants working in HEIs more visible than those in private, public, or community sectors (ii) survivorship/engagement bias (alumni who remain active in Enactus or higher education being more reachable than disengaged alumni), and). (iii) gatekeeper and network bias (participants connected to Faculty Advisors and my own professional networks are being overrepresented). To mitigate these risks, I broadened recruitment beyond the Indaba and HEI-affiliated alumni by circulating calls through established contacts and directly approaching alumni not affiliated with HEIs from Enactus South Africa's social media platforms. For instance, one alumnus worked at a power company, another at a financial institution outside South Africa, and the other two were sole entrepreneurs.

As indicated, the selection was based on the voluntary nature of the program and the willingness to participate. For instance, I contacted an alumnus working in the construction industry and another in a government department, both of whom were unwilling to join for reasons best known to them. For ethical reasons, I had no privilege to ask, but I acknowledged that every participant was free to participate or disengage at any stage if they felt uncomfortable. Therefore, these steps enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. To be eligible, current and former students must have been in Enactus for at least 1 year and have participated in at least 1 regional, national, or World Cup Enactus event. This criterion gave students a broad view of what Enactus does, especially for those who would have been exposed to these events, which draw students from institutions across the nation and globally. Hirota et al. (2022) stated that this diversity helped them understand how people's lives changed. Furthermore, Campbell et al. (2020) argued that selective criteria in recruitment improve methodological rigour by lowering biases and making research more credible, reliable, and confirmable.

4.5.3 Demographic profiles of participants

A total of 55 participants took part in the study and were grouped into four clusters. These included student interviewees (Table 4.1), focus group participants (Table 4.2), Enactus alumni (Table 4.3), and Faculty Advisors and Enactus staff (Table 4.4). These diverse groups provided various perspectives from different angles over the years. They took part in Enactus initiatives and worked with Enactus stakeholders.

4.5.3.1 University students

As presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, thirty-four students participated in this study, with 50% representation from each participating university to ensure equitable representation and mitigate potential biases, underrepresentation, or discrimination (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The students were drawn from various faculties, including Economic and Management Sciences, Architecture and Engineering, Social Sciences, Education, and Natural Sciences, among others, and from different levels of study, from first-year students and diplomas to master's levels across the two institutions.

For students, the number of active years in Enactus ranged from one year to six years. Their level of study ranged from a diploma to a master's degree. What emerged from the participation was that students who had been part of Enactus for over three years were at their postgraduate level, had registered initially in the university access programme,[10] or had done an extended degree programme.

[10] The description of the access and extended programme was accessed from the university student admission and qualifications requirements for enrolling into higher education qualifications, provided by the University of the Free State. As of 2024, the access programme allowed students who do not meet the minimum admission requirements for a bachelor's degree to complete a higher certificate programme that will enable them to join the mainstream degree programme the following year. Similarly, extended degree programmes allowed students to register for specific programmes where their high school points are lower than the minimum required to register for specific qualifications in a regular stream. For instance, students with admission points between 25 and 30 who want to pursue a degree in agriculture, administration and commerce go through this route.

Table 4.1 Demographic and academic profiles of student interviewees at the time of interviews

Category	No.	Gender	University	Years in Enactus	Year of Study	Registered qualification	Faculty
Student interviewees	1	Female	CUT	2	3	BSc Mechanical Engineering	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	2	Male	CUT	3	3	BSc Electric and Computer Engineering	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	3	Male	CUT	2	4	BSc Construction Management	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	4	Male	CUT	2	3	BSc Construction Management	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	5	Male	CUT	3	4	BSc Mechanical Engineering	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	6	Female	CUT	1	2	BCom Human Resources Management	Management Sciences
	7	Female	CUT	2	2	BCom Human Resources Management	Management Sciences
	8	Male	CUT	1	2	BA Public Management	Management Sciences
	9	Male	UFS	4	4	BSc Computer Science	Agriculture and Natural Sciences
	10	Female	UFS	2	2	BSocSci Social Science	Social Sciences
	11	Male	UFS	4	5	BEd Education	Education
	12	Male	UFS	1	2	BSc Animal Production	Agriculture and Natural Sciences
	13	Female	UFS	4	4	BCom Hons Business Management	Economic and Management Sciences
	14	Male	UFS	3	5	BSc Chemistry	Agriculture and Natural Sciences
	15	Female	UFS	4	4	Hons Sociology	Humanities
	16	Male	UFS	4	5	BCom Accounting Honours	Economics and Management Sciences

Subtotal: 16

Table 4.2 Demographic and academic profiles of focus group discussion groups

Category	No.	Gender	University	Years in Enactus	Year of Study	Registered qualification	Faculty
FGD1	1	Female	UFS	2	2	BSocSci Social Science	Humanities
	2	Female	UFS	2	2	BSocSci Social Science	Humanities
	3	Female	UFS	2	5	Master of Commerce in Business Management	Economic and Management Sciences
	4	Male	UFS	4	5	BEd Education	Education
	5	Male	UFS	4	5	BSc Chemistry	Agriculture and Natural Sciences
	6	Female	UFS	1	1	BSocSci Social Science	Humanities
	7	Female	UFS	1	2	BSc Chemistry	Agriculture and Natural Sciences
	8	Female	UFS	3	4	BCom Honors Business management	Economic and Management Sciences
FGD2	1	Female	CUT	2	3	Diploma in Human Resource Management	Management Sciences
	2	Female	CUT	6	6	Master of Commerce, Human Resources	Management Sciences
	3	Female	CUT	2	3	Dip in Human Resources Management	Management Sciences
FGD 3	1	Female	CUT	3	3	BSc Electrical Engineering Technology	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	2	Male	CUT	1	3	Diploma in Electrical Engineering Technology	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	3	Male	CUT	3	3	BSc Engineering Technology Mechanical	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	4	Male	CUT	4	2	BSc Engineering Technology Mechanical	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	5	Female	CUT	3	2	BEd Languages	Humanities
	6	Male	CUT	1	3	B Engineering Technology Electrical Engineering	Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology
	7	Male	CUT	3	2	Diploma in Tourism	Management Sciences

Subtotal = 18

Table 4.3 Demographic profiles of interviewed Enactus alumni

Category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
First year in Enactus	2012	2012	2007	2014	2018	2009	2022	2002	2002	2020	2020	2019	2022	2021	2012	2016	2012	2010
Field of work	Higher Edu	NGO	Higher Edu	Higher Edu	NGO	Higher Edu	Agric	Energy	Telecoms	NGO	Research	Law	Banking	Higher Edu	Research	Banking/ Finance	Higher Edu	Higher Edu

Legend: Edu = Education; NGO = Non Governmental Organisation

Subtotal=18

Table 4.4 Demographic profiles of interviewed Faculty Advisors and Enactus staff

Category	Gender	Institution
Faculty Advisor 1	Male	University of the Free State
Faculty Advisor 2	Female	Central University of Technology
Enactus representative	Male	Enactus South Africa

Subtotal = 3

Total sample =55

4.5.3.2 Alumni

Table 4.2 indicates that 18 alumni participated in one-on-one interviews, of whom 11 were identified as male. The alumni were drawn from various geographic locations across South Africa and had graduated from Enactus-affiliated universities between 2002 and 2023, spanning the whole period of Enactus' presence in the country. In addition to institutional diversity, the alumni represented a wide range of fields of work, including higher education, non-governmental organisations, banking and finance, research, law, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, and related sectors. This diversity reflects varied post-graduation trajectories and professional contexts through which Enactus-related capabilities were consolidated and applied. Alumni from different universities and employment sectors provided a balanced range of experiences and perspectives, shaped by distinct institutional environments and stakeholder relationships. Applying this criterion is consistent with Lim's (2025) assertion that diversity among participants reduces systematic bias that may arise when data are drawn from a single institution or cohort. Lim (2025) further argues that engaging participants from diverse contexts broadens the study's applicability and enhances the accuracy and reliability of qualitative findings, which was core in this study sample.

4.5.3.3 Enactus staff and Faculty Advisors

As shown in Table 4.4, two Faculty Advisors were interviewed, who were staff members from UFS and CUT, respectively. Additionally, one Enactus representative was interviewed in this study. Due to their leadership roles in guiding students and overseeing Enactus national enterprise, respectively, these participants provided an in-depth perspective on how Enactus activities contributed to the development of students' skills and capabilities, functionings and conversion factors presented in Chapters 6 to 8. Their participation complemented students' and alumni's experiences, improving the reliability and depth of the research.

4.6 Data collection procedures

Data were gathered between December 2023 and May 2024. Enactus annual reports were reviewed during this period, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, alumni, Faculty Advisors, and Enactus staff members.

4.6.1 Reports reviews, and notes taken while attending Enactus national expositions

A total of 12 reports were reviewed in this study. These included three from each university and six from Enactus South Africa. These annual reports provided high-level metrics for the teams and Enactus South Africa. Furthermore, these reports deepened data quality by providing

factual insights, verifying achievements, and helping identify and refine key themes that aligned with the study's objectives. Additionally, these reports helped authenticate findings from the interviews. It further assisted in triangulating data collection procedures as the preliminary findings informed the design of the FGD interview guides. Meydan and Akkaş (2024) argue that integrating multiple datasets increases credibility. Multiple data sets help triangulate, verifying facts from both sides of the data set.

The examination of the annual reports shared by the student team leaders and publicly available documents displayed during Enactus regional, national, and World Cup competitions revealed a detailed account of the teams' efforts and accomplishments. Specifically, the reports focused on understanding the following:

- ***Entrepreneurial leadership:*** The teams' ability to identify significant social needs and the innovative ways in which they used entrepreneurial skills to address these challenges, demonstrating leadership and initiative.
- ***Innovation:*** The team's commitment to using cutting-edge knowledge and methodologies to revolutionise services and technologies to meet the identified social needs.
- ***Apply business principles:*** How did teams use sound business strategies and plans, and their entrepreneurial spirit to address social problems, and how did the team demonstrate their ability to combine social impact and sustainable business models?

Sustainable positive impact: Evaluating the long-term benefits and opportunities of the teams' enterprises, emphasising how their entrepreneurial leadership, innovation, and business acumen led to measurable improvements in people's lives (Enactus, 2022).

This structured approach to reviewing the annual reports ensured that the interviews and FGDs were well-informed and focused on the study objectives. significantly improving the ability to assess the impact of Enactus initiatives on student capability development. By focusing on investigating the specific accomplishments and strategies outlined in the annual reports, I could direct my questions towards understanding the tangible effects of Enactus enterprises, particularly in fostering entrepreneurial leadership, innovation, and student development.

4.6.2 Semi-structured individual interviews

The questions in the individual interview schedule were designed to respond to the study objectives. The interviews were conducted in English. Each interview took between 30 and 70 minutes. The length of the interviews was mainly influenced by the years a participant was involved with Enactus, their role, experiences, how they valued those experiences and

learnings, and their willingness to share more when probed for further information. For instance, the longest period alumni had been with Enactus was 17 years, while students with at least 1 year of experience with Enactus or who had attended the Enactus National or World Cup expositions were among the shortest. These flexible, in-depth interviews allowed for deep exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. Magaldi and Berler (2020) noted that semi-structured interviews are adaptable and allow dynamic questioning based on participants' responses, while remaining focused on the study's objectives. Thus, these open-ended questions allowed me to dig deeper for clarity and detail, thereby enriching the data.

4.6.2.1 Virtual interviews

I was very flexible in conducting the interviews to accommodate participants from various geographic locations across the country and those outside the country at the time of the interviews. I conducted virtual interviews via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. These were the most popular online platforms I used with the 23 participants, mainly alumni. Using these virtual platforms helped me use their built-in recording facilities, which captured the conversation for transcription. However, to uphold the constitutional right to privacy, as provided for in the POPI Act, the recordings were conducted with the participants' permission.

Rahman et al. (2021) argues for the flexibility and global accessibility of virtual interviews, noting their effectiveness in expanding the participant pool by overcoming geographical barriers and the travel and logistical costs of reaching participants in different locations. This approach improved participant access and convenience and was cost-effective, eliminating travel and voice call expenses. For instance, during the interview period, two participants were in Namibia, whilst the rest were in different locations within the country. Virtual interviews improved participant comfort, as they were conducted even after work hours with their consent. This further helped elicit more candid responses and enabled more flexible scheduling. For example, when two alumni experienced connectivity issues due to power outages, rescheduling the interviews was straightforward and without adverse consequences. Furthermore, using these platforms enabled accurate data recording, which aided in thorough transcription, improving the overall quality and reliability of the research findings.

4.6.2.2 Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 students, one Faculty Advisor, and three alumni at convenient times and places that did not interfere with their daily work and schedules. A flexible, semi-structured interview guide was used to encourage spontaneity and allow different individual perspectives. Creswell and Poth (2016) stressed the importance of semi-

structured face-to-face interviews in research because they provide in-depth information that cannot be obtained solely from report analysis. This method was effective in providing rich data because it allowed for observing nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body movements, tone, and verbal responses, which, according to Alshenqeeti (2014), are embedded layers of analysis, as they capture critical nonverbal communication essential in realising how the participant feels and relates to the issues being discussed. Furthermore, in-person interviews eliminated technological barriers and concerns about digital privacy, creating a more inclusive and secure environment for discussing the subject matter (Johnson et al. 2021).

4.6.3 Focus group discussions

Three FGDs were conducted with 18 students (see Table 4.2) after the one-on-one interviews and preliminary report reviews, using a dynamic, systematic approach to encourage creative thinking, engagement, and deeper insights into student experiences. Nyumba et al. (2018) supported the use of FGDs to gather in-depth insights from individuals with shared characteristics or experiences. Minhat (2015) recommended that this approach ensures research consistency and leverages the strengths of using the same participants in interviews and FGDs. In this study, one of the strengths of FGDs was students' ability to build on each other's responses. This increased the clarity and showed the authenticity of the narratives; they could relate to their colleagues' views and perspectives

The FGDs were organised around four interactive activities to prompt participants to share their perspectives on their roles within Enactus and how this affected their capabilities and skills. In the first activity, participants were asked to identify with a specific player position in a sport of their choice. This position was related to their position in the Enactus team. For instance, one participant identified themselves as the team coach. Their explanation was that they set the strategy for the team to win their matches and provided strategic advice on how the team plays. Within the Enactus team, the participant served as the operations director. This exercise prompted participants to carefully reflect on their roles, how they contributed to the success of their enterprises, and the skills and attributes they needed to perform them.

The second activity used the River of Life concept, in which participants mapped their personal and professional journeys, reflecting on key milestones and challenges since joining Enactus, and on their future goals and aspirations, plotting their journey from its source to the mouth (Iantaffi, 2012). Figure 4.1 shows the image that was beamed during the exercise. This was gamified by identifying river features, which participants then linked to their experiences or the skills they had acquired during their Enactus journey. For instance, one participant identified themselves as a fish in this ecosystem. The explanation was that for the fish to survive in a

river, they must be tactical, agile, and make smart moves as they navigate crocodiles and other prey (challenges). This exercise emphasised individual development while promoting team cohesion by revealing common themes and collaborative opportunities. The River of Life was valuable for introspection, reflection, and discussion of Enactus students' journeys as they acquire skills and capabilities.

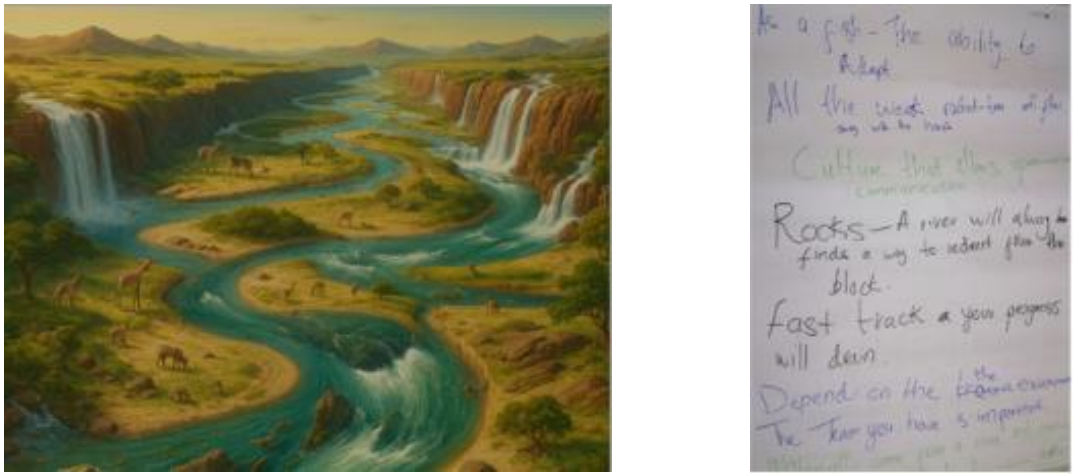


Figure 4.1 Illustrative image and notes by students during the River of Life activity

Source: Author's own (2025)

Using the image helped students recall their experiences, challenges, opportunities, and successes with Enactus and showed how these experiences shaped their personal growth and the team's success.

The third activity, the Enactus Mosaic Pizza,[11] was adapted from the traditional identity wheel concept. The identity wheel is a research tool mainly used to help participants explore and articulate their identities. This visual aid can promote understanding, diversity, and inclusion in workshops, classrooms, and team-building sessions (Marquez and Raygoza, 2023). This study deliberated on the five HDF elements: participation, sustainability, equality/equity, productivity/innovation, and empowerment.

[11] I called it *Enactus Mosaic Pizza* to creatively illustrate how blended and diverse these pillars are and to reflect the richness and complexity of the Enactus experience as shared by students.

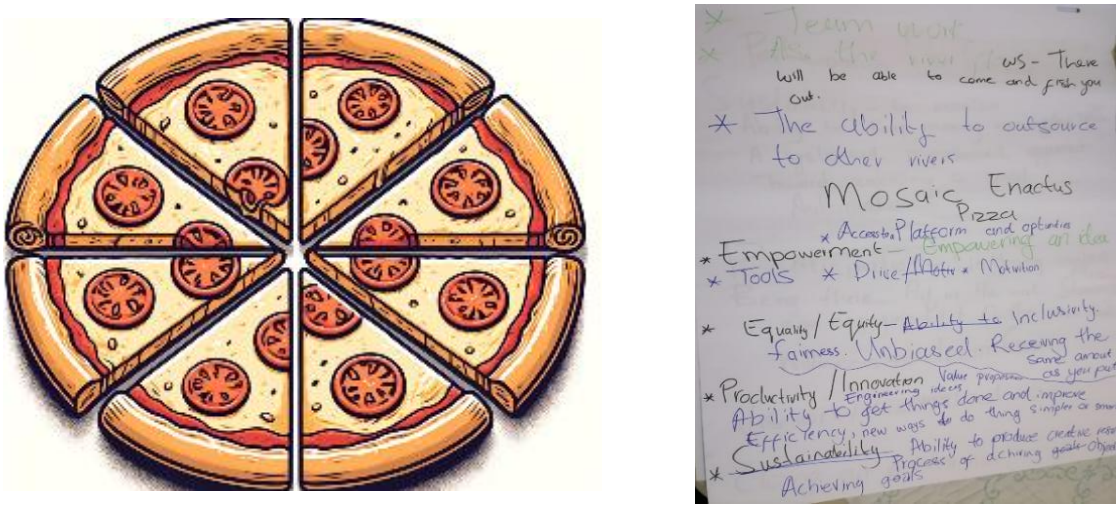


Figure 4.2 Illustrative image and notes explaining each Enactus Mosaic Pizza

Source: Author's own (2025)

I advised participants to consider Enactus through these five pillars as a guiding theme. Assuming that they were to cut the pizza into five slices, where the size of the slice meant the value of the pillar to their lives. They debated what these pillars meant to them and how Enactus contributed to their achievement. Based on the majority and convincing justification, they cut the mosaic pizza and identified what they collectively valued the most in their experience. Thus, the size of each slice correlated with the value they assigned to it. Using these pillars were not foreign to students because the work of Enactus is grounded in SDGs and directly speaks the HDF language. During these activities, I moderated and ensured everyone could share their views. As Prosser et al. (2024) argued, the role of a moderator in FGDs promotes inclusive and ethical discussions, ensuring all participants contribute meaningfully while guiding the conversation to generate rich, relevant data.

Finally, the fourth activity focused on identifying key Enactus stakeholders, discussing their roles, and sharing R100,00 among them, with the stakeholder receiving the most significant share considered most important in promoting student involvement and enterprise development. This helped to identify factors that encouraged or limited the effectiveness of Enactus initiatives in improving student capabilities. Figure 4.3 shows an illustrative image used during this activity.



Figure 4.3 Illustrative image and student ranking during the stakeholder ranking exercise

Source: Author's own (2025)

Using these methods to get students' perspectives on their experiences was enriching. It opened up various understandings of how students viewed Enactus, its stakeholders, and its contribution to their skills development, as discussed in the empirical chapters. This process was argued by Del-Real et al. (2023) as necessary for obtaining participants' opinions, priorities, and perceived barriers in the ecosystem, helping map out conversion factors for their skills and capability development.

These FGD activities were modelled based on the appreciative inquiry model, which has five stages: definition, discovery, dream, design and destiny. This model emphasises identifying and leveraging programme strengths to promote positive development, and weaknesses as areas for development (Coghlan et al. 2003; Cooperrider et al. 2008) for participating Enactus students. This began with the definition phase, in which participants defined and identified their Enactus responsibilities and linked them to sports team roles of their choice. In these activities, the participants identified the strengths they provided to the team and how Enactus impacts the development of these skills (Cooperrider et al. 2008). It was followed by the discovery phase, in which students used the River of Life to symbolise the path from the past to the present and into the future, identifying compelling moments, challenging experiences, and successful practices in their Enactus journey. In this phase, the students identified features of the river and linked them to their experiences and perceptions, thereby representing certain skill traits they developed in the process.

The third phase was the dream phase, which encouraged the participants to imagine future possibilities, drawing on the river's features and strength as it flows towards the mouth; in this case, towards their graduation and exit to the "sea" of the world outside the university. The next phase was the design phase, which involved strategising based on the strengths identified in Enactus mosaic pizza slices. This helped participants reflect and assign value to each slice representing the HDF pillars. The destiny phase, which was the last, was encapsulated in a stakeholder ranking that assessed how these relationships support or hinder their capabilities for sustainable development. Modelling the FGDs around the dimensions of the appreciative inquiry model, using gamified activities, increased participant engagement and fostered a collaborative environment conducive to long-term, positive development in Enactus students.

4.7 Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the UFS Research Ethics Committee with reference UFS-HSD 2023/1880, after obtaining permission to survey students from the CUT Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance and Programmes Directorate and Enactus South Africa's head office. Rivers and Lewis (2014) and Vanclay et al. (2013) noted that adhering to ethical guidelines is the best research practice for strengthening the quality and trustworthiness of research findings. Thus, this study was guided by the institutional ethics and the POPI Act. Copies of the information sheets were shared and verbally explained to all participants. The participants voluntarily signed informed consent to confirm their free will to participate. All recordings were captured with participant consent. However, verbal consent was acknowledged and documented for participants who participated virtually in the interviews. The right to withdraw from the study was recognised at any stage. This was to identify and abide by the POPI Act, respecting individual autonomy and privacy. No names or personal identifiers were captured or presented in this thesis. As shown in the participants' profiles, each participant was assigned a number to safeguard their privacy. The collected data were stored on a private, password-protected hard drive and a personal drive and will be kept for 5 years. It was clear to all participants that the findings would be used solely for academic purposes. The findings and conclusions of the study will be made available to participants through the university channels.

4.8 Data adequacy and comprehensiveness

Data adequacy in qualitative research is crucial to producing reliable, credible, and balanced findings. While data saturation has traditionally guided sample size in many qualitative studies (Braun and Clarke, 2012), it is essential to recognise that human experiences are dynamic, a fact that, as Sebele-Mpofu (2020) argues, does not always guarantee saturation. Sebele-Mpofu argued that individuals exposed to the same programme or process may have varied

perspectives and experiences influenced by their backgrounds and motives. Therefore, while saturation helps determine sample size, and when to stop collecting data when no new ideas are being generated, I applied information power. Information power is a more diverse and robust methodological approach to buttress the comprehensiveness of the collected data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Information power guided the study's sample size, as argued by Chitac (2022), thereby helping focus on quality and relevance. For instance, I planned to interview a total of 33 one-on-one participants; however, because participants with key experiences continually referred their peers, I ended up interviewing 37. Furthermore, Bouncken et al. (2025) added that information power enhances the depth of information gathered rather than the sheer number of participants. Using this approach enabled more purposeful sampling, efficient data collection, and experientially rich findings.

Dibley (2011) and Mwita (2022) highlighted that appropriate methodologies yield rich, high-quality data, enabling a thorough understanding. The combination of report reviews, individual interviews, and FGDs facilitated a detailed investigation of students' capabilities, yielding reliable, sufficient data. Employing multiple data collection strategies supported triangulation, capturing diverse insights and perspectives, thereby enriching the dataset. Coordinating various data collection methods was crucial for analysing and confirming emerging patterns and ensuring comprehensive responses to all research questions. The iterative engagement process validated the findings and determined data sufficiency, grounded in the information power concept, emphasising information quality over the number of participants (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020).

4.9 Trustworthiness and credibility

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is an essential measure of the quality and integrity of the study. Because this study followed an interpretivist paradigm, the aim was not to generalise the findings but to ensure that participants' voices and experiences were accurately and truthfully represented. I applied Guba’s (1985) principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in the study.

Credibility was strengthened by engaging with participants who had been members of Enactus teams for at least six months. As explained in section 4.6, four data sets were used. These sources provided enough data for triangulation (see 4.3 and 4.6.1) (Meydan and Akkaş, 2024). Furthermore, direct quotations from participants' transcripts were used to support the findings in Chapters 5 to 9, ensuring that their voices remained central in the presentation and analysis.

Dependability was maintained through the transparent research process presented in this chapter, for example, by indicating that the process was not smooth, detailing key challenges, and learning lessons. I kept detailed notes of all methodological decisions and coding processes in ATLAS.ti (see examples in section 4.12) and reflexive journals that documented how meanings were interpreted from the data. This provided a clear audit trail that supports the study's consistency.

Confirmability was ensured by continuous reflection on my positionality as both a researcher and an Enactus alumnus (see section 4.11). Furthermore, continually presented my work-in-progress during the department-organised sessions. These included the Faculty Research Day, where I presented a poster of the study findings. Furthermore, preliminary findings of Chapter 7 were presented during the 2024 Enactus Global Research Network symposium in Kazakhstan. These efforts aimed to enhance the confirmability and trustworthiness of the findings and the methodological processes.

Transferability was achieved by first describing the study participants (see sections 4 and 5). Secondly, clarifying the scientific methods of data collection (see Section 4.6), data analysis process (see Section 4.12) and presentation in chapters 5 to 9. The process's sequential flow allows readers to determine how the findings might apply to similar settings in higher education or SE.

4.10 Methodological experiences: Addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities

The data collection process was marked by both challenges and opportunities. Despite receiving initial confirmations and bookings with voluntarily willing students, there were various challenges. When planning the second FGDs, eight students confirmed their intention to participate. However, on the day, only three pitched up. The limited number of participants in the second FGD emphasised the difficulties in organising and involving students in iterative research. However, the three students who attended the second FGD shared captivating experiences. During this group session, some students hesitated to share their experience stories, reflecting the varied nature of their experiences. Realising this, I encouraged the participants to share their experiences without fear of prejudice. It assured them that these findings would not be linked to any individual. This phenomenon made me realise that, to some extent, students enjoyed sharing their learning experiences and expressing their narratives about Enactus participation.

These challenges were overcome by the approach I used in the FGDs, which were more engaging activities as explained in section 4.6.3. This made it more relaxed and turned questions into engaging activities that everyone participated in. This innovative approach facilitated the students' deep understanding of Enactus, resulting in informative and enjoyable sessions. By engaging in these collective experiences, the participants acknowledged the significant impact that Enactus has on cognitive flexibility and professional connections, empowering them to address practical socio-economic challenges effectively. These sessions confirmed that the most common thing with humanity is that everyone has a story to tell, if they have the right platform and audience (Simmons, 2015). Through these engagements, I noted that students are constantly eager to learn and share their knowledge when given a safe space and suitable conditions.

Preparing for any situation and adapting to conditions on the ground were essential to successfully navigating anticipated and unforeseen data-gathering circumstances. At first, my goal was to interview 20 students, 10 alumni, one Enactus staff member, and two Faculty Advisors. Additionally, I planned to carry out two FGDs. However, modifications were implemented in response to alumni narratives highlighting the substantial impact of Enactus on their personal and professional journeys. As a result, I increased the number of alumni interviews to 18. The number of student interviews was 16 because the students' information was rich, with the potential to improve as they understood the systems and became more involved with Enactus. Adapting to the prevailing environment and shared perspectives helped me streamline the findings to extract the most relevant information and align with the objectives. Rios et al. (2016) suggested that having a flexible schedule and accommodating participants' needs increases participation rates and provides more detailed information relating to the study. This method fosters trust and collaboration, demonstrates ethical research methods, and improves researcher−respondent relations.

Furthermore, a notable disparity emerged between the experiences of present students and alumni. While students' narratives had fewer practical examples, alumni offered many examples of how they applied their skills in the workplace. They expressed a strong desire to share their successes and insights. Their willingness enhanced the data quality and showcased the potential of Enactus to improve students' professional growth and personal advancement.

4.11 Positionality and reflexivity

Self-reflection was essential to this study because it helped me enter each interview and FGD with an open mind and a desire to learn from participants' perspectives. Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) argued that this approach enhances reliability and turns the research process into a

shared learning journey for participants and the researcher. This understanding made me realise that research should not just collect data but also be a reflective learning journey for participants.

My approach to the study was shaped by two roles: as a former Enactus student leader and as a researcher passionate about SE research and practice. Being an insider gave me a lot of insight into Enactus' mission, how it works, and the kinds of challenges it might face. With these insights, I allowed participants to express their views and perspectives without judging what might differ from my experiences. The freedom to share their narratives without building trust and rapport during data collection made the participants more likely to open up and share their experiences. However, using students, staff, and alumni was strategically used to reduce the risk of bias, especially if the views came from a single set of participants. Yip (2024) stressed that being honest about one's positionality enhances the rigour of qualitative research. I continually and critically examined myself and considered how my beliefs, values, and experiences affected the research process, which Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) identified as an active form of reflexivity critical to the research process. I also kept a reflexive journal, which Meyer and Willis (2019) argued is important for tracking how the researcher's experience can affect their interpretation or sense-making of transcripts. I also continually present my work to peers, where I get feedback that helps me objectively engage with and show my work without diluting the data collected with my views. By situating myself transparently within the SE−Enactus research context and actively engaging in reflexive practices, this study became a co-constructed, ethically grounded inquiry that values participants' voices and insights.

4.12 Data management, analysis and presentation procedures

In preparing this thesis, computer-assisted qualitative data management and analysis software (Atlas.ti) was used to support the systematic organisation, coding, retrieval, and management of interview transcripts, FGDs, and documentary sources. I used the software as an organisational and analytical support tool and did not replace my interpretive judgement or analytical responsibility. Meaning-making, theme development, and theoretical interpretation remained grounded in my reflexive engagement with the data, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study. For thesis editing, I used support tools (e.g., Grammarly) solely to improve clarity, grammar, and readability of my own written work. The intellectual content of this thesis is my original work, and I assume full responsibility for the integrity, originality, and ethical conduct of the study.

The data management process unfolded in six steps. I first transcribed the interview and FGD recordings using the Microsoft Office speech-to-text service, a built-in function on personal computers. Second, I cleaned the data by reading the transcripts and, when necessary, comparing them with the recordings. Third, I familiarised myself with the data through repeated reading, noting initial impressions and recurring ideas, identifying patterns, and comparing them with recorded reflection points after each interview. This process helped me reflect on how the data could respond to the study's objectives. Following this stage, I uploaded and ran the transcripts on ATLAS.ti, version 24, a qualitative data management and analysis application. Braun and Clarke (2021) noted that ATLAS.ti helps researchers code, identify, and report patterns or themes within data to deduce meaning. I created separate projects in ATLAS.ti for each objective, allowing me to upload transcripts for each. For instance, Figure 4.4 shows the home page for the project associated with the first objective. It included 19 documents (transcripts), including 16 one-on-one student interviews and 3 FGD transcripts.

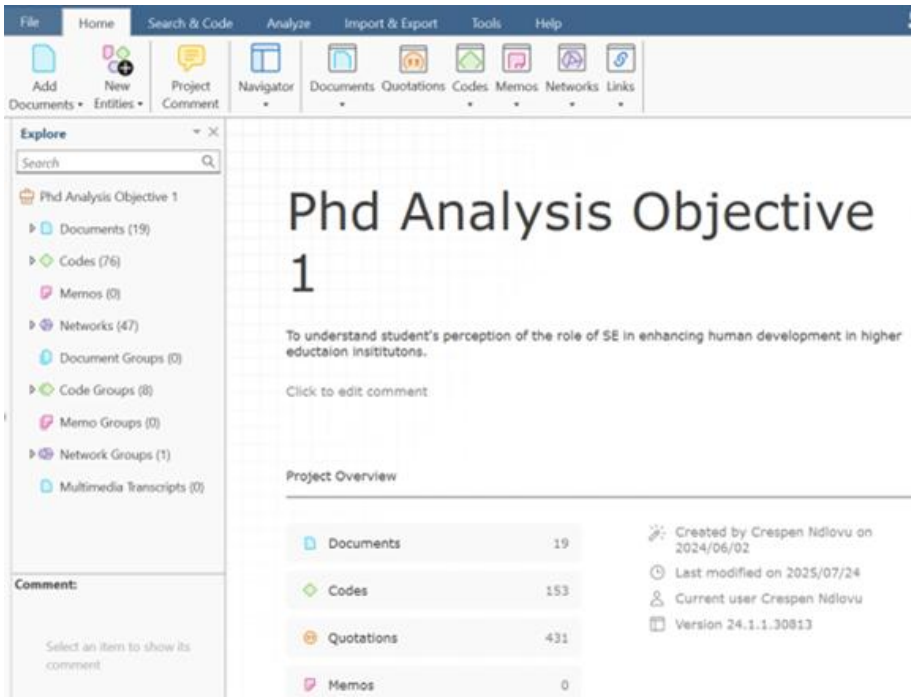


Figure 4.4 ATLAS.ti home page for a project analysing Objective 1

Source: Author's own (2025)

Coding focused on process codes describing collaboration, planning, and decision-making. Conceptual codes captured participants' key concepts and ideas, including teamwork, leadership, and innovation. Furthermore, interpretive codes captured the researcher's interpretation of the data, such as challenges and opportunities (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). Upon completing this process, I condensed the codes into key themes. These key themes were

selected based on groundedness and density. Groundedness and density, respectively, refer to how well supported the code is by data and how interconnected the code is with other codes. Figure 4.5 shows an extract of how groundedness and density appear on the ATLAS.ti project.

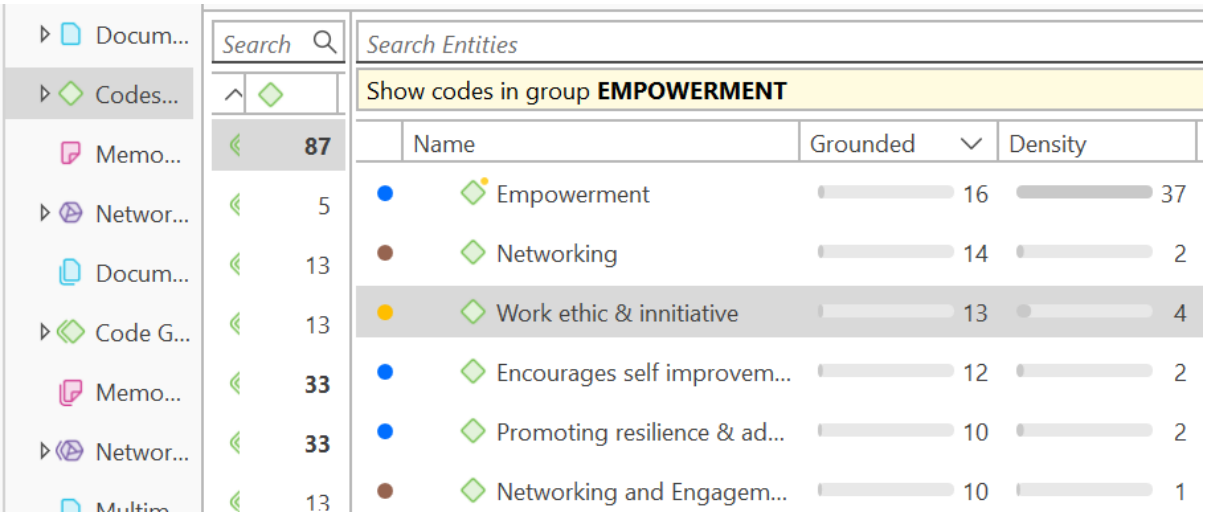


Figure 4.5 An extract from Atlas.t showing code groundedness and density
Source: Author's own (2025)

The themes with the highest groundedness and density values were finally exported to an Excel document, which was further simplified and presented in the empirical chapters.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research design and methods used to gather data on how Enactus enhances students' skills and capabilities. The interpretivist research paradigm, with a qualitative case study design, focused on UFS and CUT. Furthermore, the study population was presented, including the groups interviewed: students, alumni, and faculty. A total of 55 participants took part in this study, where in-person and virtual interviews and FGDs were conducted. The chapter further elaborated on how ethical considerations were upheld, including the processes for obtaining ethical clearance and maintaining participants' privacy in data presentation and analysis. The chapter also acknowledges the challenges encountered during data collection, explains the reflective process, and clarifies the positionality of enhancing credibility and trustworthiness. Lastly, the chapter presents how data were managed using ATLAS.ti and editing tools such as Grammarly.

This chapter sets a foundation for the following data presentation and discussion chapters. Chapter 5 provides an Enactus enterprise context to help understand how enterprise students are involved, which will shape the presentation of Chapters 6 through 9.

Chapter 5
Contextualising Social Entrepreneurship Through Student-Led Enactus Enterprises and Projects

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the Enactus enterprise context. It gives four Enactus enterprises that students and alumni were working on during data collection. This chapter builds towards responding to objective 1: understanding students' perspectives on the role of SE in advancing human development in higher education, which will be further articulated in Chapter 6. The four enterprises presented in the chapter were drawn from the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 Enactus team reports, along with insights from 55 study participants. The enterprise presented here are: Vermi Village, Bio ProFly, and the Harmony Gold NGO Support project, which is run by CUT and UFS students. The fourth enterprise, LenoKids, was founded by and is operated by Enactus alumni. They exemplify the transformative potential of HEIs in cultivating student skills and capabilities for sustainable development. In this chapter and throughout this thesis, an Enactus enterprise refers to a student-led social business initiative that applies entrepreneurial action to address community challenges, such as those discussed. These enterprises have the potential to foster innovation and sustainability, and to promote human development through enhancing students' leadership, business, and problem-solving capabilities. However, the enterprises presented here show the developmental potential of Enactus; they do not encompass the full range of student experiences, nor do they suggest consistent success across all teams or institutional settings.

5.2 What distinguishes Enactus from other (co)-extracurricular initiatives

University students can take part in many voluntary development programs, including those based on politics, religion, and culture, as well as those at the faculty level. Many of these groups give students a chance to get involved, contribute to social impact, and feel a sense of belonging. Based on the reports reviewed and participants' views, Enactus differs from these voluntary development programs in its setup and how students can get involved. From the reviewed reports and students' narratives, Enactus is presented not just as a place for volunteers; it is set up so that students can develop, launch, and run social businesses that address social, economic, and environmental challenges (Ndlovu & Lefera, 2024). On the other hand, other programs, such as Community Citizens through Engaged Scholarship for Sustainability

(ACCESS)[12], based at the University of the Free State, usually require students for short-term or ad hoc participation. The university owns the projects, and students primarily volunteer their time when they do not have academic obligations. These differences suggest that Enactus creates conditions that enable students to exercise greater freedoms and develop capabilities through sustained ownership and management of enterprises with the potential to create employment and self-employment.

The student enterprises presented in this chapter provide contextual empirical cases that clarify how Enactus functions in comparison to other student development organisations. The chapter sets the stage for a more in-depth look at participants' experiences in the following chapters. The following section discusses four Enactus student-led businesses to provide enterprise context, including what students develop and how they run them.

5.3 Selected Enactus student-led enterprises in South Africa

The four enterprises presented in this chapter were deliberately selected as examples of SE good practice. This does not suggest that all Enactus projects operate at this level of success, nor does it discount the value of less successful initiatives, which could have contributed to modelling the presented cases using lessons learned. Therefore, less visible projects, including those that stalled or failed to achieve sustainability, could have shaped the broader Enactus student experience. As a model of success, Vermi Village represented Enactus South Africa in the Enactus World Cup. In this Enactus global competition, all country champion teams come together to battle for a global entrepreneurial title. Like national competitions, Enactus World Cup seeks to award the most impactful, entrepreneurial team. Thus, Vermi Village, Bio Pro Fly, and LenoKids have represented South Africa at the World Cup on a global platform between 2021 and 2024.

5.3.1 Vermi Village

Vermi Village was identified as a female-owned, innovative social enterprise founded by CUT students. The enterprise practises vermiculture to tackle food waste, improve food security, and promote agro-enterprise in and around Bloemfontein, South Africa. Vermiculture involves breeding earthworms, such as red wigglers (*Eisenia fetida*), to decompose food waste into

[12] A UFS community engagement initiative that engages academics [including students at all levels of study] and the community in knowledge generation, promotion, application and dissemination. https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/community-engagement-home/new-approach-to-ce/engaged-scholarship (accessed 22 April 2025).

nutrient-dense compost known as vermicompost (Kaur et al. 2015). Breeding earthworms to produce manure is a sustainable and significant method that tackles organic, solid waste that contributes to landfills and pollution (Riahi et al. 2017). The process starts with students collecting food waste from supermarkets, which they have agreed to use as earthworm feed. The earthworms feed on this organic waste, decomposing the waste into organic (vermi) compost[13]. The compost is used for sustainable agricultural practices. The earthworms are kept in a controlled environment, for instance, inside an unused bathtub filled with soil. The Enactus CUT impact report (2023) noted that:

> Vermiculture is a method that utilises red wriggler earthworms to transform organic waste into nutrient-rich vermicompost. This eco-friendly approach enhances soil fertility, improves soil structure, and boosts crop yields, resulting in healthier, more nutritious plants.

The report and interviews with students from CUT, supported by Opute and Manoeta (2022) who recorded that to attain quality worms and manure, the breeding environment should have regulated temperatures between 15 °C and 30 °C and humidity levels of 50–70%. It is worth noting that the enterprise owners indicated that they had no prior knowledge of worm breeding, but they learned by doing. Thus, the enterprise demonstrates students' entrepreneurial agency by thinking beyond their academic qualifications. Furthermore, it reveals a zeal to take advantage of opportunities to address environmental and social challenges and improve their well-being, while developing business and leadership skills as they manage the enterprise.

5.3.1.1 Entrepreneurial training and stakeholder engagement

The enterprise continues to expand as students train new worm farmers in schools, churches, and tertiary institutions. For instance, UFS ACCESS is one of the beneficiaries of this project and is further amplifying the entrepreneurial approach to the communities it serves. The impact report revealed the team's continuous efforts to impact the communities around them, as noted:

> Our worm farming train-the-trainer program consists of bringing together entrepreneurs, local farmers, churches, non-profit organisations, university staff, and students to increase the number of worm growers in the region … we offer worm farming training at R600 to CUT registered students and R2 000 to external stakeholders, including theoretical and practical content, a starter pack, and 12 months of mentorship (Enactus CUT Impact Report, 2023).

This enterprise encapsulates the mission of empowering students to effect social change by providing practical skills and nurturing innovative thought (Enactus, 2023). According to the

[13] Organic manure is a natural fertiliser obtained from decomposing plant and animal material, enhancing soil with vital nutrients and increasing the natural soil structure (Poveda, 2021).

2023 CUT annual report, Vermi Village members provided on-campus and off-campus training on worm farming. The report states that these trainings were conducted at a fee, and that the beneficiaries received a one-year mentorship on the worm-farming business. This technique demonstrates members' entrepreneurial approach to expanding the worm-farming business. The report further recorded that by the end of 2023, the enterprise had generated over R55,000.00 (±USD 3,100) in revenue from selling vermicompost and from conducting training on establishing a worm-farming business. These records show how the members were entrepreneurial and promoted sustainability and productivity. At the same time, improving their beneficiaries' economic participation contributes to sustainable development by advancing HDF pillars.

5.3.1.2 Promoting inclusivity and resilience

The enterprise demonstrated women's ability to transform traditionally male-dominated agriculture-based businesses. The literature indicates that women (60–80%) are concentrated at the end of the supply chain (Rodgers and Akram-Lodhi, 2018), which involves harvesting and selling agricultural outputs rather than owning the means of production. Study findings from Doss (2018) indicated that, despite systemic challenges such as access to financial capital and traditional myths that view women as "incapable" of owning and sustaining businesses, there has been an increase in their participation, with successful outcomes. For instance, Nethengwe and Mnisi (2024:477) recorded that, although women constitute over 50% of the South African population, they own 34% of small businesses, which is viewed as a significant improvement since 1994, when the country gained its political and economic democracy. Although still low, women's business ownership has arguably been increasing over the years. These findings contradict the common myth that women are "incapable" of owning and running a business, demonstrating that female students can initiate and sustain a company with potential for success and community impact.

The Vermi Village Enterprise promotes inclusive and equitable quality education by enhancing the educational experiences of high school and university students. The enterprise provides practical application of waste management and composting lessons that captivate students and deepen their understanding of sustainable agriculture. This exposure is not for students specialising in agricultural sciences but is open to everyone interested in sustainable agriculture. The multidisciplinary nature ensures inclusion and equal access to and participation in valued opportunities.

Execution of this enterprise contributed to improving access to food as a fundamental human right. Thus, empowering youth in sustainable agricultural systems. Also, contributing to building resilient communities with the autonomy to own their food production systems (food sovereignty) and a drive to self-sufficiency, as recorded in the report:

> Based on the outcomes of the workshops, we realised that there is a need for food security within the local school systems, which can be promoted by implementing school gardens and educating learners on basic agricultural practices (Enactus CUT Impact Report, 2023).

The enterprise ensures sustainability and scalability by engaging various stakeholders, such as training high school learners and collaborating with Community Citizens through Engaged Scholarship for Sustainability (ACCESS) at UFS. Although the enterprise shows potential success through its collaborations and approach, as recorded during the interviews, the students and owners highlighted their various challenges, such as their economic backgrounds, which arguably test their business resilience. As they deal with these challenges, they get lessons in life and business, a critical component of capabilities from lived experiences:

> We all face challenges regardless of origin, but they do not define us. Enactus inspires us to overcome these challenges and write our stories of resilience (Enactus Interviewee 7).

The project enhances environmental sustainability, inclusion, and resilience by reducing landfill waste, supporting schools, and fostering student engagement through hands-on skills relevant to addressing challenges such as pollution, food security, and business acumen. The United Nations (2022) hailed the need for such approaches to argue for their contribution to achieving the SDGs. Social enterprises such as Vermi Village localise these global decisions, showing how HEIs can "act locally and think globally", meaning how their local actions can contribute to a global impact.

Enactus CUT was crowned twice as the South African Enactus national champion in 2022 and 2023 through this enterprise. This allowed the students to represent Enactus South African universities on a global stage in 2022 and 2023 with 36 other country champion teams (Enactus, 2025). The team's achievement reflects the potential of SE networks to promote student engagement and create empathetic graduates with the agency to use their capabilities (potential opportunities) for positive change.

5.3.2 LenoKids

This was identified as an interactive education platform for primary school learners. This is because access to quality education is essential for sustainable development; however, it remains an elusive goal, particularly in developing countries (Chankseliani and McCowan,

2021). According to Mather (2024), in South Africa, over 81% of Grade 4 learners struggle to understand what they read. This highlights a critical problem that has ripple effects in future as these learners proceed to higher education. These problems underscore an urgent need for innovative, scalable education solutions. This is where LenoKids come in. LenoKids is an educational technology initiative developed by Enactus students in South Africa. It uses social media and is delivered iteratively, encouraging learners to engage and enhance their reading and comprehension. The enterprise was crowned the national champion in 2024 and represented South Africa at the Enactus World Cup that year (Enactus, 2024). It adopted an innovative approach to improving literacy among children between three and thirteen (Enactus, University of the Western Cape, Annual Report, 2023). By June 2024, the enterprise was expected to have upskilled 32 tertiary students in digital skills to facilitate learning for over 793 primary learners who had subscribed to the enterprise.

5.3.2.1 Enterprise success in empowering students

The success of this enterprise can be measured by the growing number of schools and the increasing participation of learners. Furthermore, the sustainability of the skills learners acquire determines the success of enterprise efforts. Its innovative approach has attracted global attention, earned it various national and international recognitions, and secured it the 2024 Enactus South Africa champion title. The interview with one of the founders revealed the following, which was also recorded in the team's annual report:

> The enterprise has received several awards, which include the Top 3 Early-stage Action with Africa Challenge 2024; International Finalist Swiss-Africa AIT Conference 2024, Regional Finalist in Global Startup Awards 2024; Top 12 African startups for the Switzerland Residency Week 2024; Top 360 global startups for Hult Prizes Global Summit 2024[14] (Alumni Interviewee 18).

Various awards and global recognition of LenoKids demonstrate the social enterprise's potential to transform education worldwide and advance sustainable human development. Through these awards and its global reach, the enterprise has secured support and collaboration with international organisations such as the Ford Foundation, Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), and Absa. The Co-founder further revealed that they have been broadcast on eNCA, a South African news channel with over 3,25 million users per month across its various online platforms. These collaborations and exposures suggest the enterprise's potential to transform education. This, therefore, calls for institutions to support student initiatives with the potential

[14] The Hult Prize Global Summit 2024 refers to the semi-final events held across seven global locations, where selected student teams pitched their start-up ideas addressing pressing global challenges. These Summits served as a pivotal stage in the competition, determining which teams would move forward to receive mentorship, investment opportunities, and compete for the US$1 million prize at the Global Finals. https://www.hultprize.org/how-it-works/ (Accessed, 16 August 2024).

to impact the communities. Thus, Wang and Yangjie (2020) argue that supporting student entrepreneurship is a sustainable strategy to address graduate unemployment. Similarly, Allais (2022) applauded that students flourish when universities create supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems, allowing them to test and apply their ideas and learn new skills.

5.3.2.2 Empowering students through LenoKids

The evolution of the LenoKids enterprise necessitates entrepreneurial thinking, which demands creativity, innovation, and strategic planning. Managing the online learning platform and engaging with stakeholders improves students' leadership and collaboration skills. Shor (2021:42;79) indicates that these practical experiences can include "students growing plants, flowers and food grains in class" and taking trips, observing the environment, weather, and stars. These examples are what Enactus students do contextually and what potentially bring value and meaning to their lives and the community. Thus, Swargiary (2021) argued that these experiences equip students for future careers and cultivate a sense of responsibility and commitment to fostering social change, paramount to sustainable human development.

However, learning through online social media platforms such as WhatsApp has faced resistance from parents and guardians, citing concerns about learners' focus, privacy, and the amount and type of information, which are perceived as too much for children (Dong et al. 2020; Mukute et al. 2020). Also, the fear of children's technological incompetence has emerged as a concern for parents and guardians. Additionally, Chomunorwa and Mugobo (2023) have shown that the financial costs of online learning also drive parents' reluctance, despite WhatsApp being considered a low-cost social media platform. Mutambara (2023) notes that, while all these points are valid, students have outgrown their parents when navigating online learning platforms. The interactivity of these platforms has enabled learners to grasp more quickly than parents might assume. In this regard, LenoKids, as an enterprise, has navigated these challenges over the past three years of its operations. The ability to navigate these challenges indicates the students' agency in providing inclusive educational solutions. It also shows how determination and resilience can yield personal and professional development, contributing to empowerment and addressing inequalities, among other challenges.

5.3.3 Bio ProFly

Bio ProFly is a social enterprise developed and managed by UFS Enactus team. The enterprise was a runner-up in the 2023 Enactus South Africa competition and reportedly went to the World Cup as a showcase enterprise. This enterprise breeds black soldier fly larvae (hermetia

illucens[15]) in a controlled environment where they do not grow beyond the pupa16 stage. Records from the teams' reports and propositions by Da Silva and Hesselberg (2020) indicate that breeding is carried out under controlled conditions at 25–30 °C, with flies mating and laying eggs on decomposing organic matter at 60–80% humidity. The eggs hatch into larvae, or maggots, within five days. The larvae are fed on food waste for up to three weeks and then become pupae, the last stage before they mature into adult flies. Students from various faculties studying towards different degrees engaged in this enterprise, following scientifically established conditions. During breeding, larvae decompose organic waste, producing organic manure called frass (Poveda, 2021). Participating students reported that the compost is used for agricultural purposes, with a value similar to that of vermicompost offered by the Vermi Village enterprise. It was further revealed that using this form of fertiliser contributes to environmental sustainability and enhances soil fertility without synthetic (artificial) fertilisers, which are arguably blamed for degrading soil structure. The soldier larvae are harvested and dried, served as high-protein feed for livestock and poultry, and used in aquaculture.

5.3.3.1 Advancing sustainability through a cost-sharing business model for small-scale farmers

The Bio ProFly project tackles these challenges with its sustainable methodology. This methodology helps farmers and bolsters entrepreneurial initiatives by enhancing household food security and economic stability, as recorded in the team's report:

> The cost-sharing business model involves collaborating with local crop farmers, grocery stores, supermarkets, and restaurants to collect food waste. This waste is then used to produce black soldier flies, which are harvested and fed to chickens, cattle, pigs, and goats as a high-protein feed. The livestock farmers can then supply their products to small businesses, such as Shisanyamas and butcheries. This business model creates a corporate social responsibility and investment between local farms and supermarkets. Producing black soldier flies requires minimal machinery and relies heavily on recycling. Crop farmers benefit from the byproducts of black soldier fly production, which provide fertiliser for their soil while generating income from food waste and through a partnership with local supermarkets (Enactus UFS, Qwaqwa annual report, 2023).

The annual report records a cost-sharing business model that enables Enactus students, farmers, and rural communities to tackle environmental and economic challenges through co-creating environmentally friendly solutions. The interviewed members of the enterprise reported that in April 2024, they collected 200 kg of food waste, which was used to breed black soldier larvae. Through this exercise, they further reported having contributed to reducing up to 115 kilograms

[15] Black soldier flies (*Hermetia illucens*) are insects known for their larvae's ability to decompose organic waste. The pupa is a high-protein feed source for livestock, aquaculture, and poultry.
[16] The pupal stage in insects such as flies is a transforming, stationary phase of complete metamorphosis (transformation), converting larvae into fully developed adults.

of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide is one of the key gases contributing to global warming. In the same period, the students raised over R500 in revenue through this enterprise (Enactus UFS, Qwaqwa annual report, 2023).

Through the Bio ProFly project, students acquire entrepreneurial and leadership skills by overseeing and leading the breeding of black soldier flies. Their impact goes beyond personal benefit to impacting small-scale farmers. These farmers gain organic manure (frass) to boost crop production. As reported in the annual report, engagement with various stakeholders shows a collaborative spirit, a critical capability that students learn and develop. The whole process shows how it contributes to environmental sustainability through the reuse of food waste. It further shows how the enterprise promotes economic participation.

While breeding the black soldier fly has gained global recognition for its environmentally friendly approach, with potential for sustainable waste management and the production of high-protein feed, the method encounters various challenges. Hansen et al. (2024) stated that critical technical challenges include reliance on ideal conditions for egg laying, organic matter, and disease control. Hansen et al. (2024) further highlighted that environmental issues such as climate sensitivity and inadequate waste segregation impede operations, while Enactus students highlighted it as the best community solution:

> As students in Enactus, we conduct research and ask questions. Early this year, I came across someone who was talking about black soldier flies. I became curious and did further research. Upon recognising its entrepreneurial and environmental value, I introduced the idea to the team. Like now it's one of the most vibrant enterprises on campus as we speak, after we were runner-up during the Enactus national competitions this year (Student Interviewee 9).

The above narrative shows how the student came to know of the idea of black soldier flies. Furthermore, it shows that the student had potential leadership qualities, as the concept was introduced to their team, absorbed, and practised. This led to its national dominance, suggesting the entrepreneurial power, team commitment, and the enterprise's potential to solve multi-layered social problems.

However, Cadinu et al. (2020) argued that widespread adoption and sustainability of such initiatives often face significant socio-economic and cultural barriers, including limited initial investment, skills gaps, and weak regulatory frameworks needed to create a conducive operational environment. While the project was co-created with the community, student participation is frequently challenged by the competing demands of academic responsibilities. Cress et al. (2023) and Tumuti et al. (2013) observed that balancing academic work with Enactus activities potentially strains students' well-being. This sometimes results in students withdrawing from the enterprise or in their academic performance being compromised.

Although such outcomes were not explicitly mentioned during the interviews and FGDs, the observed disengagement of some students and the limited success of certain enterprises suggest the importance of further investigating the underlying reasons behind these challenges, an area beyond the scope of this study.

5.3.4 Harmony Gold non-governmental organisation training

This was the fourth project showing a partnership between Enactus South Africa and Harmony to use students to tackle societal challenges. Over the past decade, Enactus South Africa has collaborated with Harmony Gold Mining Company on special economic and social development projects. For instance, between 2023 and 2025, Harmony Gold Mining and Enactus teams engaged with the Harmony Gold mining communities' NGO project. In this social initiative, Enactus teams, including CUT and UFS students, engaged NGOs near their campuses to improve regulatory compliance and provide training on basic project management principles. The target areas for this project were Matlosana (Klerksdorp), Ratlou, Matjhabeng (Welkom), Mogale City (Krugersdorp), and Merafong City (Randfontein). Enactus CUT and UFS were allocated to Ratlou and Matjhabeng, which are in Welkom and closer to CUT and UFS campuses. The teams were tasked with developing a training programme, facilitating skills transfer, and checking NGO compliance with government regulations and basic business and project management basics. A reviewed Enactus memo showed the focus of the project:

> We are pleased to announce that Harmony Gold Mining Company Limited has pledged its continued support to Enactus South Africa through the 2024 Harmony NGO Support Program Enactus Challenge. Enactus teams are invited to develop and implement programmes that help local NGOs enhance operational efficiency and secure funding. The Harmony NGO Support Programme aims to improve the quality of funding applications submitted by NGOs in Harmony host communities, ensuring compliance with the requirements of the South African Revenue Service, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, and the Department of Social Development (Enactus South Africa Memo 22, 2024).

According to the same Memo, the Harmony NGO support programme demonstrates how SE, exemplified by Enactus in this case, leverages student expertise and learning opportunities to empower NGOs in rural and peri-urban areas of South Africa. The Memo indicated that more than 40 NGOs and social enterprises had been identified in Ratlou and Matjhabeng, where CUT and UFS students will work.

To achieve the objectives of the projects, participating students need to understand the requirements of the South African Revenue Service, the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, and the Department of Social Development. During the interviews and focus group discussions, students who had participated in this project highlighted that, with the

support of Enactus national coordinators, they had to research the required information and prepare presentations towards meeting the project mandate:

> ... being part of the project taught me to take and understand the numbers behind it. As a business leader, you must understand the finances, not just get clients. Picking up general project management skills and communicating were the top things I learned from Enactus (Student Interviewee 11).

The student's narrative suggests that participating in experiential learning initiatives requires a willingness to learn beyond theoretical knowledge. In this case, the student had to take the initiative to learn accounting in order to contribute meaningfully to the enterprise. Students enhance their teamwork and communication skills by engaging with diverse groups, while cultivating a sense of social responsibility and community engagement. Such programmes empower students with capabilities that extend well beyond the classroom. According to Bauman and Lucy (2021), not every student is inherently "entrepreneurial," meaning that studying entrepreneurship does not necessarily lead to business launch. Similarly, participating in Enactus initiatives does not automatically mean that every student will start a business, nor does it mean that they will gain entrepreneurial skills to the same extent as other participating students. Instead, entrepreneurship should be seen as a behavioural mindset rooted in problem-solving and community empathy (Pidduck et al. 2023). Despite varying entrepreneurial outcomes, students acquire valuable personal and professional skills by participating in such student organisations. These experiences can provide practical context for their studies, especially those studying qualifications related to enterprises in which they may be engaged.

Although the Harmony Gold NGO support project offers students opportunities for experiential learning, building community relations, and cultivating practical skills, various challenges undermine its effectiveness. The reviewed Memo (Enactus South Africa Memo 22, 2024) reveals a significant administrative burden in terms of reporting requirements, substantially increasing students' workload. Coupled with their overwhelming academic work, these responsibilities can stress students and affect their academic performance if they fail to prioritise their tasks (Nayak and Kachhi, 2024; Buckley and Lee, 2021). However, students from the Vermi Village project mentioned Enactus pressure as a necessary challenge for refining their resilience and time management skills. This suggests that not all difficulties faced by students may affect their academic performance; rather, it depends on how each student responds to these pressures, which ultimately determines whether they succeed or are negatively affected.

The student views and literature suggest that the impact of these SE initiatives on student academic programmes can be an individual agency, where those who enjoy the challenge may thrive. At the same time, those who lack time management and multitasking skills may find it challenging to navigate, which can lead them to drop out of such a programme or experience

reduced academic performance. However, flexible schedules and pre-training in time management could be ideal and improve students' confidence and effectiveness, as Campion (2013) noted. When students are closely mentored, they tend to develop unbeatable confidence and deliver the best results with their projects. Therefore, the findings from my study and the literature, while showing varying understandings of student academic pressure, indicate that students differ and that their drive to engage in SE varies. Not all students participating in Enactus may fully commit and perform well academically, especially if they cannot manage or prioritise their time. Hence, there is a need to continually check or provide training on working time and prioritisation, a critical attribute for graduates.

5.4 Discussion

The social enterprises presented in this chapter provide an overview of what students do within the Enactus organisation. These examples provide context for determining the kinds of capabilities and skills students acquire in the process, which will be presented in the following chapters. Social enterprises are increasingly recognised as critical vehicles for addressing societal challenges, potentially fostering innovation, advancing empowerment, expanding freedom and opportunities, and enhancing human capabilities. This recognition is affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 77/281 (United Nations, 2023), which positions social and solidarity economy entities, such as social enterprises, as instrumental to sustainable development.

DeJaeghere (2017) argued that entrepreneurial skills alone are insufficient; education must also expand youth agency, which is their ability to make meaningful choices. Thus, the kinds of entrepreneurial skills they acquire ought to enhance critical thinking and the ability to challenge structural inequalities and pursue meaningful livelihoods. The Vermi Village enterprise enables students to develop skills and contribute to environmental stewardship, offering a practical understanding of waste management for community well-being and sustainability. These experiential opportunities align with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which emphasises the importance of learning through practice and enhances capabilities such as critical thinking and decision-making, factors argued by DeJaeghere (2017, 2018) as necessary for entrepreneurial citizens. The enterprise promotes empowerment and inclusivity, for instance, in the Vermi Village, where students conducted training with schools and communities, enabling youth and women to participate in socio-economic activities for their well-being. This is further noted by scholars such as Ban et al. (2017), who suggested that experiential learning is effective in maintaining knowledge retention. McCarthy (2016) argued that experiential learning converts theory to meaningful practice to address pressing community

issues. Furthermore, Beckem and Watkins (2012) suggested that such experiential practices bring life to learning and are critical to retaining student understanding and preparing them for significant roles that could potentially offer fulfilling lives.

Similarly, enterprises such as LenoKids, which use AI and gamification to provide students with English comprehension and acquire technical skills while promoting creativity and strategic thinking, are crucial in the modern digital era. Enactus enterprises connect HEIs with local communities by cultivating partnerships and collaborations that benefit all stakeholders. This is illustrated by initiatives such as Bio ProFly, which contributes to no poverty, food security and decent employment SDGs 1, 2 and 8 and the Harmony Gold NGO support project, showing the contribution to the SDG 17 partnership for sustainable development, which enables students to co-create solutions with the community for the community, thus exercising democratic development principles.

Participants reported that the Bio ProFly initiative enhances food security and creates economic opportunities for smallholder farmers by enabling them to produce organic feed for their poultry projects and organic manure for their backyard gardens. In the same vein, involved students acquire various skills, such as collaborating and acting entrepreneurially. Zahra and Wright (2016) asserted that social enterprises enhance communities by cultivating social capital and promoting economic autonomy (agency), which can be linked to how the presented enterprises contribute to student skills and community social and financial well-being.

At the core of the student-led enterprises is their focus on sustainable development. Each enterprise sees this with a specific emphasis on certain SDGs. For instance, the Vermi Village addresses the dual challenge of organic waste and methane emissions while enhancing agricultural productivity. This aligns with SDGs 12, 13, and 15, which emphasise sustainable production and environmental stewardship (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, LenoKids promotes inclusivity and access to education (SDG 4, access to quality education), key components of human development, by tackling literacy challenges among rural children through an AI-powered chatbot that supports the right to quality education (Mathai, 2024). Student participation in these initiatives fosters a culture of social responsibility and inclusive innovation, as highlighted by Amachraa and Maad (2023) and Silva et al. (2023). Hower, Sinthupundaja et al. (2020) posed a critical question: “What are the essential capabilities enhanced by SE towards shared value (collective agency)?” This question suggests a profound reflection on the value of SE in higher education. It further resonates with what the study seeks to achieve. This invites a deeper reflection on whether SE meaningfully develops capabilities that students themselves value and whether SE contribute to social impact.

The examples of enterprises presented in this chapter provide a perspective on the role and contributions of SE in advancing student capabilities and agency. While successful Enactus projects are often showcased on national and international platforms, unsuccessful projects also provide students with valuable learning opportunities, and they are eager to improve to reach the national and global stage. This alone suggests the drive to become better, learn and improve with experience. For instance, after years of development, LenoKids' recognition at the Hult Prize Global Summit and Vermi Village's recognition at the Enactus World Cup in 2022 and 2023 demonstrate student resilience and a hunger for success. It also shows the opportunities for enterprise scalability and their potential to foster global collaborations. Global exposure empowers students to see themselves as global citizens, recognising that they live in an interconnected world that seeks to work together in driving positive change and impact.

Nonetheless, despite the various benefits of student enterprises to society and students, these initiatives face a range of challenges that can limit students, institutions, and communities' ability to convert opportunities into meaningful outcomes. Cress et al. (2023) and Tumuti et al. (2013) alluded to the fact that students often struggle to balance academic responsibilities with SE demands. Nayak and Kachhi (2024) further note that this dual focus can lead to stress, burnout, and compromised academic performance. These challenges were mentioned in high-demand projects such as Vermi Village and Harmony Gold's community reporting and training activities, which require significant time and effort from students. However, it should be noted that successful businesses have thrived through sacrifice; at this stage, students' priority is first to acquire a degree. This conundrum poses challenges to students' ongoing commitment, contributing to the failure of their enterprises.

Moreover, projects like Bio ProFly present technical and logistical challenges, including the need for specialised equipment and controlled environments to support black soldier fly production, which are challenging to meet in resource-constrained settings. As Farhoud et al. (2021) observed, limited access to funding is a common barrier for social enterprises, particularly in developing countries, indicating that the absence of these critical conversion factors may hinder the realisation of desired outcomes from student-led initiatives.

In addition to financial and logistical constraints, successfully implementing these initiatives depends heavily on students' technical proficiency and ability to manage complex, interconnected systems. For example, ensuring optimal conditions for black soldier fly breeding or practical vermiculture demands require specialised knowledge that students may not possess or have easy access to (Roslan et al. 2022). This shows the need for targeted training and mentorship programmes to equip students with the expertise required for sustained success. DeJaeghere (2017) reinforced this point by calling for the development of "entrepreneurial

citizenship" within higher education, integrating capability development with critical engagement and practical attributes.

It is critical to note that student do not face challenges as they execute their enterprises. Like in any society, there are certain cultural prejudices and market opposition that can impede the acceptance of innovative solutions, especially in developing countries. Implementing insect-based products, exemplified by the Bio ProFly initiative, could cause scepticism in numerous communities (Adler, 2022). Drawing from Sen's "development as freedom", Ang and Van Dyne (2015) implicitly noted that culture can hinder collective functioning, which can affect the potential of such enterprises in enhancing collective capabilities and autonomy. This view presents the opportunity for students to apply a dynamic approach to address these challenges, as experienced in the adoption, for example, of the Bio ProFly enterprise. Robust marketing and awareness initiatives became essential to overcome these cultural obstacles. Participants from Bio ProFly enterprise indicated that, through these awareness initiatives, they acquire marketing skills and the ability to negotiate and sell their businesses (value proposition). These are among the critical skills modern entrepreneurs need to thrive in an unforgiving world.

To optimise the influence of SE in higher education while confronting its challenges, universities ought to provide resources, mentorship, and adaptable scheduling to assist students in reconciling academics and entrepreneurial practices, as Woods et al. (2022) argued for. However, this could be a challenge for universities that have not yet institutionalised experiential practices, such as SE, within the curriculum. This argument is not to accommodate all non-curricular activities, but to understand the value of experiential learning in improving students' capabilities and skills beyond education, not only for employment. The arguments here are not about the voluntary organisation, such as Enactus, but about the value of experiential learning, which is advocated as one possible strategy for addressing skills mismatch, a factor that largely contributes to graduate unemployment. An appropriate strategy in higher education could facilitate sustainable development and cultivate a generation of socially responsible leaders with complex employable capabilities, augmenting their qualifications.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented four examples of Enactus enterprises in which students participate. These discussed enterprises are Vermi Village, Bio ProFly, LenoKids, and the Harmony NGO support project. These student-led Enactus businesses demonstrate how SE can help solve societal challenges such as pollution, quality education, food security, and environmental sustainability. As the initiative's main agenda, these enterprises address societal problems; it is

arguable that they also provide calloused skills and capabilities to participating students. For instance, students gain valuable leadership, innovation, and resilience skills despite challenges such as a lack of institutional support and sustainability issues. On another note, balancing academic demands with entrepreneurial responsibilities remains difficult for students, especially when these responsibilities do not contribute to their academic achievement. However, these enterprises highlight the critical importance of HEIs cultivating supportive ecosystems for experiential learning and entrepreneurship as a foundation for long-term human development.

The following chapter presents participants' views on the role and value of SE in higher education. This provides information to potentially improve decisions about blending SE approaches in teaching and learning, to help students gain practical skills and create social impact.

Chapter 6
Student Perspectives on the Role of Enactus in Promoting Human Development in Higher Education

6.1 Introduction[17]

Chapter 5 presented four selected enterprises that students have developed and engaged in. Building from the overview provided, this chapter now introduces students' perspectives on the role of SE through the lens of Enactus in fostering human development within HEIs. This chapter addresses research objective 1 by examining students' perceptions of SE's role in advancing human development in higher education. The findings are organised into three primary themes: personal, professional, and social development perspectives. Firstly, personal development enhances adaptability, problem-solving skills, and confidence, allowing students to succeed in dynamic environments. Secondly, the discussion focuses on professional development, which relates to readiness by equipping students with technical skills, interpersonal abilities, and ethical decision-making attributes. These are necessary qualities for graduates entering the workforce and running their enterprises. Third and last is social development, which is viewed as fostering agency for community engagement and promoting a commitment to social responsibility. This broadly aligns with students' agency and aspirations to effect meaningful societal change. It is noteworthy that, although these themes are presented independently, they are intertwined and overlap, showing that human development is a holistic approach that builds on many interrelated facets. This chapter discusses these findings and their relation to the broader theoretical perspective. While these viewpoints emphasise favourable developmental outcomes, students' experiences were inconsistent and influenced by varying degrees of engagement, institutional support, and project sustainability. Therefore, these views do not disqualify students who may have a different experience. Still, they present the majority views of study participants and the negative views, which should be further interrogated in future research projects.

[17] The preliminary findings in this chapter were presented at a conference and published as Student perceptions of Enactus in advancing human development in higher education. In: Building a sustainable future: The intersection of SDGs and social entrepreneurship. *Compendium of the Enactus Global Research Network, Academic Conference and Scientific Symposium* (2024, pp. 97-105). Astana, Kazakhstan. https://www.enactusaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/EGRN2024compendium.pdf

6.2 Role of social entrepreneurship in advancing human development in higher education

Personal perspectives emerged as a multifaceted theme in understanding the role of SE in higher education. These perspectives span personal, social, and professional interconnected dimensions, reflecting the multidimensional nature of student experiences. Their interconnectedness suggests the comprehensive scope of human development, as SE in higher education operates holistically, simultaneously fostering personal growth, social engagement, and professional readiness. For instance, when a student leads the enterprises presented in Chapter 5, they cultivate self-confidence and leadership (personal), enhance community partnerships and trust (social), and acquire project management and problem-solving expertise (professional) skills. The three dimensions identified in this chapter mutually reinforce one another, showing how SE in higher education can foster well-rounded graduates with the skills and attributes to contribute significantly to society. Thus, SE in higher education could enhance conventional curricula by integrating experiential, impact-oriented learning that promotes comprehensive human development, enabling graduates to be more than merely employable, and providing students with practical skills that are frequently lacking in traditional academic frameworks. However, these outcomes were most pronounced among students with sustained leadership roles and deep commitment to their Enactus teams, suggesting differentiated capability conversion within Enactus teams.

6.2.1 Perspectives on personal development

Initiatives such as Enactus are typically non-credit-bearing and offered as extracurricular activities within South African HEIs. They are often voluntary and form part of students' choices to contribute to institutional community engagement initiatives. Students are usually drawn to Enactus by personal ambition and entrepreneurial drive, believing it provides meaningful experiences they value. The findings revealed that their interests and engagement with Enactus were shaped by various factors, including time constraints, perceived relevance to their academic programmes, and individual goals. As a result, their perspectives on the value and developmental potential of Enactus differed.

As outlined in Chapter 4, Research design and methodology, students shared their perspectives in FGDs, incorporating game-like elements to explore these perspectives, prompting participants to narrate their Enactus journeys using metaphors drawn from games or activities familiar to them. For instance, using a river to narrate their experience, where each feature, such as landforms, animals, and river structures, symbolised different moments or insights in their Enactus journey. This creative approach deviated from traditional interview techniques,

which can feel like tests or formal exercises, and instead encouraged deeper engagement, creativity, and authentic reflection. Rahayu et al. (2022) supported the value of such interactive methods, noting that they motivate participants to share richer, more meaningful insights. These methods enabled students to reflect on why they chose Enactus over other student organisations, what they hoped to gain, whether their expectations had been met, and what improvements could be made. Ultimately, this creative approach allowed students to articulate their experiences, share their motivations, and reflect on their growth. It further helped describe how their involvement in Enactus has shaped their values and aspirations.

Table 6.1 summarises the sub-themes leading up to the personal perspectives for human development.

Table 6.1 Subthemes building up the personal development perspective

Subtheme	Description
Motivations for joining Enactus	To acquire entrepreneurial skills, expand their perspectives, and contribute to social change. To pursue experiential learning opportunities and tackle societal challenges through innovative solutions.
A platform for personal growth and leadership development	Through enterprise development and leading teams, Enactus offers opportunities for nurturing leadership skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Students improve their ethical awareness, communication, and teamwork skills while gaining confidence and entrepreneurial agency.
Developing teamwork and collective impact	Operating in teams enhances team spirit and the sharing of ideas, contributing to valued shared impact.
Developing resilience and adaptability	Students develop the capacity to adjust to challenges and excel under pressure. Ongoing participation in social entrepreneurship activities cultivates strategic thinking, adaptability, and proactive problem-solving abilities.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

The following sections expand on the subthemes in Table 6.1, supporting them with students' views to provide further context and help in analysis and interpretation.

6.2.1.1 Motivations for joining Enactus

As presented in the methodology chapter, where I discussed the structure of students participating in Enactus, the student organisation is voluntary and open to any registered student at any affiliated university. In this case, participating students from various levels of study and

different faculties and qualifications reflected their motivations for joining Enactus, emphasising personal exposure to learning, creating impact and making a difference in their societies. Their understanding of social impact resonated with what Adams et al. (2015) noted as enduring advantages derived from initiatives aimed at innovation and resolving social challenges.

For instance, one student noted:

> I joined Enactus because I wanted to gain entrepreneurial skills and be exposed to fields unrelated to my studies (FGD 1 student 6).

This suggests the desire to broaden their horizons beyond academic studies, which is critical in the ever-changing world. On another note, student one from FGD 2 indicated:

> I joined Enactus to make a difference in my community and contribute to social change (FDG 2 student 3).

Similarly, the purpose of joining Enactus was:

> …To see how far they could get in [social] entrepreneurship, what change they could make, and what they could take from the experience (FDG 3 student 5).

These quotes suggest that the students were self-motivated, cared about their communities, and wanted to make a difference through SE. In other words, these expressions further indicate that the students understood the core focus of Enactus to be social impact and the creation of better communities. In this process, they could gain experience that they could use in their lives and social enterprises, should they consider establishing one.

The students' reflections indicated that they perceived Enactus as a space for experiential learning and personal growth, offering opportunities to implement their academic knowledge in practical settings. This could also provide a perspective that while they were eager for hands-on experience, the university qualification they were registered for may not offer such experiential or social impact on learning opportunities; hence, joining extracurricular organisations such as Enactus provided the much-needed exposure and experience. This suggests that the motivation to join Enactus was driven by personal growth and a desire to challenge themselves in addressing societal challenges through innovative and sustainable enterprise solutions, as shown in Chapter 4.

6.2.1.2 Platform for personal growth and leadership development

Building on the motivation for personal development, the students shared that Enactus provides platforms that promote personal growth across multiple dimensions. This is confirmed by students' ability to learn leadership skills through managing enterprises, making important

decisions, and motivating their teams. They cultivate resilience and adaptability by confronting real-world challenges and adjusting to unforeseen changes. In support of this, Rahdari et al. (2016) highlighted that students assess social issues and devise innovative and potentially sustainable solutions. In this process, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities are nurtured.

The diverse nature of student enterprises enabled students to engage with and partner with various stakeholders, including corporate partners and community members. Through these platforms, students noted that interacting with diverse peers and community members enhances communication and interpersonal skills, enabling them to collaborate across teams and communities. These facets of personal development illustrate the potential ability of Enactus to equip students to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. To this effect, Hargie (2021) argued that interpersonal and communication skills are the art of effective networking, working in teams, sharing views and influencing a positive change. This was evident in students' perspectives, as they could relate to how these manifested in the enterprises and projects they participated in. For instance, one male student indicated that:

> … We found ourselves working with local people who cannot speak English or understand my home language, Zulu. This encouraged me to learn and to find simple ways to communicate and clarify our enterprise. Especially in the Vermi Village, it taught me how to communicate effectively and work as a team by assigning tasks to members who may have a better understanding and by allowing their time to be flexible during class days (FGD 3 student 6).

Supporting this perspective, another interviewee also highlighted that:

> The networking and teamwork in Enactus are what made the difference for me. It's where I learned the value of collaboration, especially when conducting worm-farming training (FDG 2, student 3).

These accounts indicate the students' perspectives on the role of interpersonal and communication skills in building strong, supportive networks that empower students within the SE framework. Therefore, to succeed in Enactus, they must develop the skills to work with people and manage and grow their enterprises. The mention of how these skills manifested in the enterprises they were engaged in shows the role and contribution of Enactus in enabling students to be agile leaders who are forward-looking and who continually master essential skills for successful individuals and teams. In light of these perspectives, Altinay et al. (2022) alluded to the fact that such interpersonal skills acquired through these platforms are relevant in any environment where people work; therefore, they become a critical skill component for the success of individuals and their teams in their current and future endeavours for social impact.

6.2.1.3 Developing teamwork and collective impact

As part of personal development, students shared perspectives on their collective efforts. Collective efforts, in this sense, align with teamwork and shared responsibility to achieve the enterprise's desired team goals. Highlighting their understanding of SE in promoting teamwork to improve results for community positive change, as noted:

> To link with the river of life, our work started small but grew as more people got involved, just as a river rises and flows. Individual contributions contributed to the enterprise's bigger picture. These contributions made our team make a real difference, and we were recognised by Enactus Judges when our enterprise became champion (FGD 3 student 3).

Additionally, another student noted:

> To add to the previous speaker, the impact of our Vermi Village was powerful. While it enables us to learn and grow as individuals, it results from everyone's contributions, like a river formed by many streams coming together and pouring their water into the big river (FGD 3 student 4).

The student insights reveal how students perceived their participation in Enactus as an ecosystem that contributes to holistic student development and drives collective impact. This is because they acknowledged that they individually learnt and collectively created impact in the process. Thus, individual growth contributed to the broader team's success. Using the river of life metaphor,[18] students could show the power of teamwork (streams coming together), each bringing unique skills and energy (water) to make a stronger network where everyone learns and grows together.

6.2.1.4 Developing resilience and adaptability

Resilience and adaptability were significant attributes that emerged from student narratives. These attributes were drawn from Morrison et al. (2017: 2-4), who described resilience as "the capacity to modify approaches in response to changing circumstances and the capability to be tactical in dealing with challenging situations". Hence, using the river of life metaphor, a female student noted that:

> As fish adapt to their environments with predators, we constantly adjust our strategies to address challenges, such as landfills and food waste. Through the execution of our enterprises, I learn to handle pressure, like balancing my schoolwork and enterprise demands. I had to plan. But sometimes things did not go as planned. For instance, our Vermi village prototype failed several times, but we kept redoing until we were champions in 2022 and 2023 (FGD 3, student 1).

[18] Drawing from the River of Life concept used in team-building exercises, I used this visual and narrative tool to help students reflect, map out, and make sense of their Enactus journey. They used it to compare their Enactus experiences to a river, capturing its flow, obstacles, turning points, and significant experiences.

From the above accounts, the student highlights how resilience and adaptability could be observed. Failing, never giving up, and experiencing that activities sometimes do not happen as planned. Their ability to narrate their experience with precision shows that they have learned critical lessons. Using the fish as an example in the interactive river-of-life analogy captures this perspective: “just as a fish requires tactical skills, flexibility, and proactivity to navigate a river full of predators” (challenges). Students adapted to the demands of entrepreneurial processes, including failure, planning, and strategising in their enterprises, such as the mentioned Vermi Village. These experiences show practical ways HEIs can instil the attributes they seek students to have acquired upon graduation to prevail in the ever-changing world.

6.2.2 Perspectives on professional development

For many participants, Enactus served as a link between academic knowledge and its practical application. As students highlighted that it enables them to address social issues while developing critical entrepreneurial skills, Enactus (2022:11-14) grounds this thinking by noting that teams should make entrepreneurial efforts that lead to meaningful change in people, the planet, and prosperity. Through interviews and FGDs with students, they indicated that, unlike traditional classroom settings, Enactus engages students in experiential projects that address societal issues, requiring the practical application of theoretical knowledge through a collaborative approach. The experiences show how professional attributes such as planning and project management are manifested.

The professional development, as the second of the three main themes of the role of SE in higher education, is supported by various subthemes illustrating how participants viewed the influence of Enactus on the professional development of students. Table 6.2 presents a summary of the sub-themes and a short description of what they mean; however, this is further explained in the following sections.

Table 6.2 Subthemes for professional development through participating in Enactus initiatives

Subtheme	Description
Project management skills	This relates to the skills and attributes students developed and the way they ran their enterprises. These include planning, financial management, risk management, leadership and communication skills.
Professional preparedness	The experience of managing teams and running enterprises manifested in students' enhanced skills in critical thinking, communication, delegation, and assigning tasks to one another. Also, the manifestation of resilience, networking and self-awareness describes professional preparedness.
Resilience and problem-solving	This manifested in students' adaptability and flexibility in executing their enterprise. Being resourceful and creatively finding solutions. Using networks to achieve their goals, and continuous reflection and learning.
Leadership and decision-making	Students need to understand their environment, have a vision and a goal, and be clear about what needs to be done. Their ability to collaborate, delegate and learning in the process.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

Table 6.2 summarises what professional development means to participants; the following sections explain further, drawing from participants' narratives.

6.2.2.1 Project management skills

The participants explained that Enactus provides platforms for learning to manage the processes of planning, executing, and evaluating projects, designing budgets, and using the Business Model Canvas.[19] These attributes are valuable in professional project management settings, especially in an ever-changing world that requires people to think and engage with others to address social challenges. To clarify this, one student highlighted that:

> Enactus has been a platform where I have learned to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. The skills I've developed here, such as project management and leadership, are things I never imagined I'd gain in a university setting … I have served my team as the project manager. I think I have been doing well and learning in the process (FGD 1 student 7).

Similarly, another student who participated in the interview mentioned that:

[19] Refers to a visual project management tool used to create, describe, analyse, or develop a new social value creation framework, which social entrepreneurs use to plan how they make, deliver, and create value for social impact.

> I have grown professionally through various tasks I was entrusted with, especially designing team reporting templates and submitting monthly reports to Enactus South Africa's head office. It wasn't just about getting the job done but learning something new in each task (Student interviewee 11).

These experiences suggest that students view Enactus as providing an environment that broadens their skills in every position and participation. This is because, from the narratives, triangulating with the team guidelines and the reports reviewed, Enactus teams are compelled to provide regular reports on their project progress. Students recognise that their project management skills are enhanced by preparing these documents. These experiences enhance students' confidence, cultivate a professional mindset, and tap into opportunities to address challenges. For instance, the enterprise presented in Chapter 5 demonstrates that the initiatives are designed to address social challenges. Students use the entrepreneurial power to design and implement sustainable solutions. This practical involvement facilitates the connection between theory and professional preparedness. Enactus is a potent incubator for career advancement and human-centric attributes that empower students to earn and value their futures.

Furthermore, several students shared how they have benefited from being part of the Enactus network. It is worth noting that although the experiences may differ, they all revealed the potential contributions the organisation can make to students. This suggests that when such networks are supported in universities, they can expand students' freedoms and choices. Enactus functions as an engaging learning platform that allows students to test ideas and witness the results of their choices. Expanding on this note, a male interviewee shared his perspective:

> Enactus has helped me understand the steps to start an enterprise and develop a feasible and successful business. I manage the team's projects. We create different tasks for our prototypes, and I oversee them to ensure the team completes them. I'm more involved in developing our products, seeing them from the ideation phase towards the prototyping phase, including designing the casing of our prototypes and the electrical specifications (Student interviewee 4).

The above expression suggests that the student has grown and gained project management skills. This student demonstrates they have gained leadership skills by managing teams, planning product development, and overseeing the transition from idea generation to prototype development. It also shows growth in technical design and accountability. This suggests that Enactus enables students to acquire the real-world skills they need to run businesses and drive innovation together, augmenting what they learn in a mainstream class. While students share these personal experiences, it is worth noting that there is a desire to learn among students who shared their views. This understanding echoes the argument of Iwu et al. (2021) that the entrepreneurial mindset transcends beyond business knowledge. This means that entrepreneurship involves identifying opportunities and creating value. Furthermore, it refers to students' ability to make and act on their choices. The ability to approach problems from

multiple angles and persist in finding solutions makes them invaluable assets in any field, especially in roles that prioritise adaptability and initiative. This reinforces that students can enhance their career paths by developing these essential skills while contributing to human development efforts within and beyond their professional domains.

6.2.2.2 Professional preparedness

During the interviews and FGDs, the students highlighted that participation in Enactus projects cultivated professional preparedness. Professional preparedness describes how students become competent as they assume entrepreneurial and leadership roles in SE initiatives, such as Enactus. In the context of Enactus, the students revealed that being professionally prepared does not only mean learning technical skills; it also means developing soft skills, personal insight, and the ability to think critically. Their ability to execute their enterprise responsibilities well is affected by these experiences, which also help them become more self-aware and flexible, as one student reflected:

> I took insight and validated the learn, unlearn, and relearn model as presented by Sis Lulu.[20] Also, from that engagement, I learned that it is essential to keep revisiting your understanding and evaluation of your first opinion on everything and anything (FGD 3, student 3).

On a similar vein, another student in the same group concurred and highlighted that:

> … to add on what the previous speaker said, I also learnt that before looking for an external issue, realise that you, as an individual, may add to the problem, so understanding this helps me to work on myself before I try to work on the outside (FGD 3 student 6).

These reflections suggest that Enactus activities help students internalise important professional values, such as continuous learning, self-reflection, and responsibility. The student's acceptance of the "learn, unlearn, and relearn" approach shows a shift towards a professional identity focused on growth, which is necessary for working in dynamic environments. Also, focusing on checking personal assumptions before blaming others shows emotional intelligence and moral development. These essential conversion factors make it easier for students to connect with others, lead with empathy, and positively impact their future careers.

6.2.2.3 Resilience and problem-solving

Throughout the data collection process, students demonstrated a remarkable appetite for knowledge and an eagerness to explore innovative problem-solving approaches, particularly when developing solutions to real-world challenges. This was evident in initiatives such as the LenoKids enterprise, which showcased students' ingenuity in using social media platforms for

[20] Sis Lulu panel discussant during the 2023 Enactus National Exposition in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa.

educational purposes. Furthermore, in the Vermi Village, the ability to take advantage of food waste to create value whilst addressing pollution and reducing contributors to global warming and climate change. The process began by converting food waste into worm feed, which in turn produced nutrient-rich compost for plant growth. The same worms were harvested for fish bait, while the composted soil, enriched through vermiculture, boosted farm yield and was reported to have improved urban gardens by up to 30%. These outcomes are supported by empirical studies, such as those of Sinha et al. (2010) and Kaur et al. (2015), who found that vermicompost can enhance plant growth by over 50%, protect the soil by 40%, and remain significantly more cost-effective than chemical fertilisers. Notably, most students involved in the project had no prior agricultural background, underscoring their capacity for continuous learning and knowledge application, symbolising resilient, solutions-oriented thinking.

In the Enactus ecosystem, such learning is often promoted by challenges, where students participating in FGD 3 unanimously recited the phrase "where others see challenges, we see opportunities".[21] This suggests that challenges drive team curiosity. This means their innovation and enterprises are based on solving real-world challenges such as food security, pollution and quality education. In supporting this student behaviour, Avelino et al. (2019) argued that entrepreneurs remain agile and adaptive, capable of navigating complex and unpredictable environments. Critical thinking, creative imagination, and the ability to think outside the box are not just encouraged but are necessary. This mindset was vividly articulated through the metaphor of the river of life, where students likened their growth to a river bending around obstacles, seizing opportunities at weak points, and cascading over waterfalls, symbolising bold risk-taking and strategic navigation. This metaphor showed students' evolving ability to confront adversity while remaining anchored in long-term vision.

Student experiences showed how resilience manifested. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to reduce its spread, governments put in place measures that affected the freedoms of movement and physical meetings. It is during this period that students attest to becoming smarter by devising strategies to cope. As one student reflected:

> During the COVID-19 lockdown, I was home alone, with limited internet access and no friends to visit or talk to. However, I spent much of my time thinking about how to make the most of this period. In the process, I learnt how to use this time effectively to work on my tasks, read and research for my studies,

[21] This phrase was observed in various Enactus platforms, such as student reports, the visited Enactus websites and presentations referring to what motivates students to do what they do in the way they do it towards creating a better world for all.

> and contribute to the enterprise. This is because while freedom of movement was halted, I was expected to move forward with everything (FGD3, student 8).

To add to the above, a participant in the first FGD expressed that:

> The challenges we faced, such as securing funding and managing time, were tough in my role … especially during lockdown (FGD 2, student 3).

This expression suggests a heavy weight on the student's shoulders during the lockdown, when the world entered a new normal of isolation, loneliness, restricted social gatherings by law, and the fear of contracting the virus. All these were not just moments that bypassed, but provided lessons and experiences that put what students considered resilience and the ability to solve problems to the test.

While all these moments continued to shape their way of life, the students involved in one of the Enactus NGO projects presented in Chapter 5 shared their side of the story on how their resilience was tested:

> But there were also moments when I realised my potential and resilience, especially with the Harmony Gold LED competition. Climbing the "steep learning curves" [from the metaphor of the river of life] in preparing reports and presentations for the stakeholders we worked with, LED to achievements and gave me the recognition I needed to move forward in my career through continuous learning (FGD 1, student 7).

These experiences suggest that the absence of peers and working in constrained environments with scarce funding were not merely hindrances but essential components that built resilience and opened doors to new opportunities. Similarly, the steep learning curves resonate with the challenges entrepreneurs face and navigate to create a better world. The students further mentioned that Harmony Gold projects required active community engagement, which led them to apply proper planning techniques to reach the targeted communities in the Matjhabeng Municipality in Welkom, Free State. Thus, when students engage with the community with whom they communicate differently from their peers, it suggests opportunities for enhancing effective communication and engagement skills.

6.2.2.4 Leadership and decision-making

Leadership and decision-making are the ability to make decisions that affect a group, dependent on one's instructions (Kerr and Tindale, 2004). Milne et al. (2022) expanded this understanding to be a transformative process and learning. Thus, the definition contextualised students' views as navigating the complexities of their enterprise leadership roles, pushing them to refine their decision-making abilities for better enterprise social impact, as one FGD member stressed:

> Leading a team within Enactus taught me more about decision-making than any class. It was real, with real consequences and rewards, mainly when we chose team members to go with for Enactus World Cup

> competitions, where various factors were considered, clearly spelt out, and communicated to those selected and those not (FGD2, student 2).

The assertion above reveals another trait that emerges as part of leading and making decisions, where every team member felt entitled to go for the Enactus World Cup[22] presentation because they were part of the team. However, in this instance, the team leader demonstrated boldness and effectiveness in communicating and reviewing the set parameters, and in determining which members were selected to represent the team. Furthermore, the above expression was supported by an interviewee who stressed the importance of owning the consequences of the decisions that leaders take:

> Overseeing a project made me realise the importance of strategic thinking. You can't just make decisions on the go; you need to consider all the factors, challenges, and tensions that may arise from the decision you take (Student interviewee 13).

The Enactus World Cup is a prestigious international event that every Enactus student would want to attend, regardless of their contribution to the team. Therefore, during the preparation for this event, students stressed that selecting who should represent their team in such a platform tests ethical leadership and decision-making abilities. The verbatim above shows that they had to demonstrate strategic boldness and objectivity. These insights reveal the opportunities that test and bolster student leaders' abilities. While such skills can be taught, the practice makes them real. It also helps student leaders realise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to decision-making. This suggests that the Enactus network creates and provides an experiential learning environment. This supports literature emphasising experiential learning and "learning by doing" for skill development and knowledge retention (Kolb et al. 2014). Kolb (1984) proposed the experiential learning theory, stating that hands-on experiences help students to actively engage, reflect, and apply knowledge in real-world situations. Ban et al. (2017), Booth (2011) and Hadjerrouit (2015) suggested that experiential learning increases student comprehension and knowledge retention, citing that lecturing contributes up to 10%, group discussions up to 50%, and practice up to 75% comprehension. Although different schools of thought may debate these values, it is essential to note that learning by doing enhances students' understanding of concepts and theories.

6.2.3 Perspectives on social development

Perspectives on social development are the third interconnected theme, alongside the first two themes discussed above. The experiences shared here show students' perspectives on SE's

[22] Enactus World Cup is a prestigious international entrepreneurial event that brings together country champion students from enterprise teams to showcase the impact of their enterprises on a platform featuring over 34 participating Enactus countries, alongside global businesspeople and academics (Enactus, 2025).

contribution to social development. Social development is viewed as contributing to the "social good" and creating a better world for everyone, where poverty, inequality, and factors contributing to climate change and other global challenges are sought to be reduced. Various organisations in HEIs contribute to this cause, and Enactus is one of them. Students in this study shared their journey, offering a distinct perspective on how SE can create agency for social responsibility and community-engaged citizens. Biesta (2009) and Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020) highlighted that social impact is part of the university's community engagement objectives. This is fuelled by the need to contribute to the SDGs, especially around reducing inequality, improving quality education, and addressing climate change. I will first summarise student perspectives on this theme in Table 6.3, which will be further explained thereafter.

Table 6.3 Summary of subthemes for social development

Subtheme	Description
Teamwork and collaboration	This goes beyond coordination to collective capability-building through shared goals, communication, and collaboration with various stakeholders to achieve social impact.
Promoting inclusivity in team diversity and agency for social responsibility	Enabling an environment where every student participates regardless of their academic affiliation. Promoting equity, justice, and participation in enterprises to empower communities and build the confidence of participating students.
Community engagement and impact	Students engage with communities to co-create initiatives, fostering servant leadership and promoting sustainable impact.
Building supportive networks	Supportive networks comprising mentors, corporations, and institutions enhance student outcomes by promoting knowledge-sharing and fostering sustainable enterprise development.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

6.2.3.1 Teamwork and collaboration

Student voices portray Enactus as a platform that enables their hidden abilities to flourish. Through their narratives, it is depicted as allowing them to work in teams and support each other in achieving the broader social impact goals. Teamwork and collaboration in this context go beyond coordination to a collective effort, built through shared goals, communication, and working with various stakeholders to achieve social impact (De Prada Creo et al. 2021). In triangulating discussions with students through FGDs, interviews and reviewing Enactus impact reports, it was revealed that when students work with business organisations and communities, the aim is to reduce social problems such as poverty, food insecurity and

unemployment challenges, and create sustainable enterprises that will create more sustainable opportunities (Enactus, 2025). The students indicated that Enactus provides a platform for working together to address the above-mentioned challenges. From the students' perspective, a participant from FGD 1 noted that:

> Without teamwork, our projects would not have moved forward. It's like water in a river; every drop contributes to the flow, and nothing moves forward without support from each other (FGD 1, student 6).

Using the river of life metaphor, the above expression shows how the students conceptualise the importance and power of teamwork for progress. On a similar note, one of the interviewee s noted:

> Our relationships with peers and mentors were like those of animals and plants along the river, depending on each other. For instance, when one of our team members was attending school, we could take on their responsibilities, and they would catch up with us at their next available time. This helped us thrive even during COVID-19 (Student interviewee 9).

Using the river-of-life analogy made the conversation enjoyable and clarified their experiences. Through this analogy, students showed their interdependence and supportive systems and that the strongest part is important as the weakest link for achieving collective success. Furthermore, another perspective emerged from FGD 2:

> Enactus South Africa has many sponsors who have supported our various enterprises. For instance, ABSA Bank was crucial in our enterprise financial support and training. Using these networks further improved our community footprint. It kept us connected and helped us grow together into who we are today (FDG 2, student 2).

The above quote suggests that students recognised the importance of networks, collaborations, and mentorship in building and sustaining successful teams in SE. It expresses their acknowledgement of collaborations and sharing of responsibilities according to the stakeholders' abilities. For instance, highlighting ABSA's role in financial support and training. Thus, SE in itself is not a solo activity; it is carried out through collective action. Therefore, this notion aligns with Halberstadt et al. (2021), who argued that collaboration, with diverse partnerships, and mentorship support are key success drivers of SE start-ups and even established firms. Furthermore, echoing the UNGA (2023) resolution on collaborative approaches to achieving the SDGs.

6.2.3.2 Promoting inclusivity in team diversity and agency for social responsibility

Students' perspectives show that Enactus promotes inclusivity through diversity. This creates a sense of belonging where, despite students coming from various countries such as Lesotho, Namibia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, and from different provinces within South Africa and

communities within the Free State province, their diversity helps them harness others' strengths to build resilient teams. This was testified when one student indicated the following:

> Coming from rural KwaZulu-Natal province and joining a team led by a non-South African, and with no knowledge of what to do and what the enterprise was, I felt equally valued as a senior member as I got along. In the agricultural enterprise, I was part of a team where everyone had a voice, regardless of background or expertise (Student interviewee 9).

The above expressions stressed that the student felt joining a team with no knowledge of what to do and finding comfort in such an environment was a strength of Enactus teams. Such understanding cultivates a mindset of willingness to learn, sharing knowledge, and the agency for social responsibility. Through this experience, it can be argued that inclusion in the Enactus team involves recognising that, while everyone may be on the same journey, their needs differ in terms of background and study specialisation. This could be further explained by the fact that participating students are multidisciplinary and at different levels of study; however, despite these differences, the team thrived on the power of their differences, bringing different levers to achieve sustainable progress.

The agency for social responsibility builds on environmental stewardship, which has become fundamental to sustainability due to climate change and global warming. When asked how their enterprises contribute to the SDGs, the student revealed the following:

> Our projects primarily address social and environmental issues. Besides the Vermi Village, we are working on an Energy and Tech solution. We are developing a generator powered by renewable energy to reduce atmospheric pollution caused by burning fuels when generators operate (Student interviewee 7).

The above perspective suggests that students appreciate the diverse members, opportunities and resources of their enterprises. However, an understanding of how to minimise environmental damage while using natural resources must be developed, as reflected in the kinds of enterprises they engage with. For instance, the Energy Tech solutions were mentioned as an attempt to reduce pollution.

Although these enterprises are operating on a micro scale and are still in their early stages, it is critical to note how they aim to address key global challenges, such as climate change, underscoring the value of SE as a multidimensional approach to social development. Crippa et al. (2021) noted that food waste accounts for a third of greenhouse gas emissions.[23] Thus, converting food waste into an input to the Vermi Village shows how the enterprise contributes

[23] Gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide trap heat in the atmosphere, contributing to the greenhouse effect and leading to global warming and climate change (Riahi et al. 2017).

to regenerative agriculture,[24] with potential benefits for social development, such as upskilling students and creating community impact through regenerative agriculture, the potential to increase food security, and creating employment for youth and women, a critical factor of economic and social inclusion.

6.2.3.3 Community engagement and impact

Social responsibility is hinged on community engagement and impact. Students perceive community engagement as collaborating with communities to design and implement SE solutions that drive social impact. In this process, students engage with the community in the planning, execution, and benefit-sharing of SE initiatives, thus enabling servant and responsible citizen attributes. To clarify this, an interviewee noted the following:

> Our potato project's success depended heavily on the relationship we built with the cooperative in the Free State. Their input guided us. Through further collaborations with other stakeholders, such as the university and Motheo, we provided training on basic business principles, including proper record-keeping and management (Alumni Interviewee 3).

The student's perspective highlights how community engagement broadens their skills and deepens their learning in working with people. This learning-by-doing approach is crucial in turning ideas into tangible solutions. Thus, it emerges that students are equipped to understand and address social challenges through action-oriented, co-creation approaches. When the community is actively involved in the processes of designing solutions for their challenges, Roseland (2012) argued that the outcomes have the potential of becoming sustainable because there is a sense of ownership of the co-created solutions. Working with communities acknowledges the importance of understanding diversity and harnessing its power to bring diverse views to bear on solutions to critical issues.

Furthermore, explaining the concept of diversity, during the FGD2, a student noted that:

> Diversity in our team was our strength; it brought out ideas we wouldn't have considered if we had worked as individuals (FGD 2, student 3).

This reflects that their engagement with Enactus has enhanced their understanding of diversity and their ability to work with people from different backgrounds, recognising the benefits of considering diverse opinions that may lead to conflict or hinder progress. This assertion suggests that students appreciated the multidisciplinary nature of the course. They also worked together to develop robust solutions. Jooste and Hagenmeier (2022) noted that South African

[24] A holistic and sustainable way of farming that improves and fixes the health of ecosystems, especially soil, water, and biodiversity, makes crops grow better, makes farms more resilient, and helps people make a sustainable living.

universities promote the internationalisation of staff and students, encouraging the enrolment and employment of non-South Africans in critical areas, in line with government policies. International students registered at the institutions under study contributed their rich tapestry of knowledge. In contrast, local students helped refine these ideas to enhance community solutions, revealing the teamwork for impact.

6.2.3.4 Building supportive networks

The understanding of social development was further expressed as building supportive networks for impact. Students stressed how Enactus encourages supportive networks that nurture their skills and abilities. Through the FGDs' identification of key stakeholders and their roles, students across all three groups suggested that the university is a critical, supportive institution for their operations, contributing to social impact and skills development. They further stressed that Enactus has wide partnerships with various corporations that fund their enterprises and offer training to improve their skills. This can be linked to the Enactus, Harmony Gold NGO support partnership project presented in Chapter 5, which focuses on using students' skills to enhance local NGOs' compliance with government regulations. Thus, summarising the importance of these supportive networks, one student concluded that:

> … the support we received from our institution and other Enactus partners was like the "soil that provides nutrients to the plants in the river". Without it, we wouldn't have had the resources to grow our projects (FGD3).

The students' expressions suggest their appreciation of the support from the stakeholders they identified as key to their operations. For instance, they argued that they were registered students at the university, studying towards a qualification of their choice. Being allowed to engage in such SE initiatives was an appreciated gesture from the university. Enabling SE to thrive in the university environment allows students to advocate for social justice and promote equality by supporting communities, volunteering, and acting upon their values and goals to enhance the community they come from. This helped students develop the skills of responsible citizenship and collectively contribute to the community's welfare.

6.3 Discussion

This chapter described and categorised students' perspectives on the role of SE in the Enactus programme, assessing its influence on personal, professional, and social development within HEIs. Grounded in the HDF and CA, the findings illuminated the different ways in which SE, through Enactus, fosters critical skills, resilience, and agency among students who participate in these initiatives. The study's findings are linked to the literature to demonstrate how Enactus'

innovative, experiential approach to learning promotes academic and personal development in higher education.

These dimensions (personal, social and professional) do not operate in isolation but intersect to foster holistic student growth. As synthesised in Figure 6.1, Enactus and similar initiatives cultivate resilience, empathy, and ethical decision-making; strengthen leadership, entrepreneurial, and strategic skills; and promote collaboration, inclusivity, and community engagement. This integrated perspective shows how SE is an enabling platform for multidimensional student capability development.

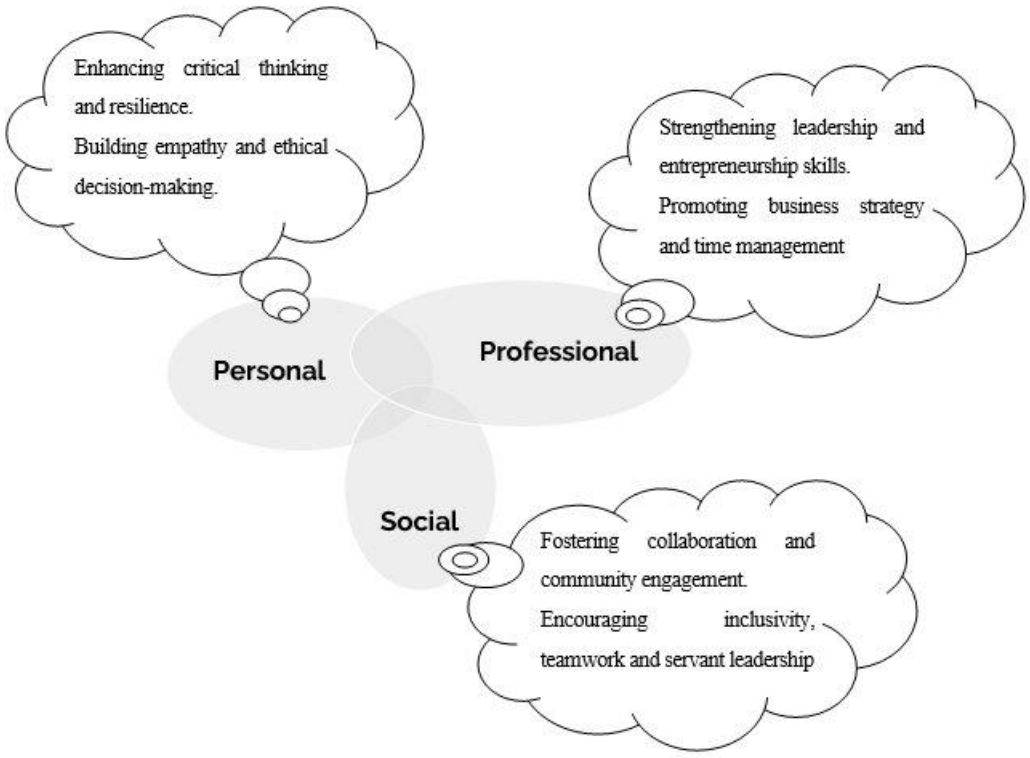


Figure 6.1 The multidimensional role of social entrepreneurship in advancing human development

Source: Author's own (2025)

Figure 6.1 shows the interconnected personal, social, and professional roles of SE in promoting human development. For instance, personal growth was evident in students' resilience and adaptability during the prolonged trials of the Vermi Village enterprise presented above. The three dimensions presented in this chapter do not emerge in isolation. Their interconnectedness shows that they are all working toward a single purpose: equipping students with the skills and attributes necessary to navigate the complex world. For example, resilience and confidence presented under the personal dimension enhance effective collaboration, which emerged under the social dimension. Both strengthen leadership and entrepreneurial readiness, a key element

of the professional dimension. Their overlap demonstrates the multidimensional nature of human development fostered through SE.

Furthermore, the social dimension emerged in initiatives such as LenoKids, which prioritised inclusivity and ethical responsibility in learning through social media and AI. At the same time, professional development was demonstrated through leadership, innovation, and collaboration in the Harmony Gold NGO support project, which brought together student and corporate support. Together, these dimensions show how Enactus creates a holistic learning ecosystem that enables students to develop and expand their capabilities and outcomes, advancing individual flourishing and broader societal development.

Most importantly, from the students' perspectives, they understood the social challenges they sought to address through their enterprises as guided by the United Nations SDGs. For example, the four enterprises presented in Chapter 5 were linked to access to quality education (SDG 5), improving food security (SDG 2), climate action (SDG 3), reducing hunger (SDG 1) and creating employment opportunities (SDG 8). It was evident from the views they shared that they understood pressing issues faced by their communities, the country and the world at large. Also, it was clear that Enactus and its partners support student initiatives woven around these global goals. Therefore, their perspective on SE as contributing to personal, social, and professional development stems from understanding how they contribute to a better world, using their networks, available resources, and learning by doing, thereby broadening their graduate attributes through experiential practices. These views align with the CA, which emphasises the importance of opportunities to achieve the outcomes one values (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009). The availability of these opportunities further strengthens the empowerment, equality, and participation pillars of HDF, which are critical for individuals to make choices about their lives and live meaningful lives (Ul Haq, 1995).

Enactus is not the only platform providing experiential opportunities for students. However, this thesis uses it as a lens to understand how student networks contribute to student development. This is to illuminate discussions in HEIs on how universities could provide opportunities to students from multiple disciplines, offering platforms for experiential learning. Ban et al. (2017) argued that giving students experiential learning opportunities offers the highest learning outcomes compared to various teaching pedagogies.

The personal, professional and social development themes presented in this chapter build upon existing literature on experiential learning for graduate development. For instance, Kolb's (1984) Experiential learning theory stresses the value of learning by doing, contrasting it with traditional learning methods, which are passive and assume students as knowledge absorbers

rather than co-creators. This theoretical perspective aligns with the HDF, particularly its inclusion, participation, and empowerment pillars. The human development pillars emphasise the value of development initiatives that enable individuals to express their views, access opportunities, and shape their own sustainable futures. The findings of this chapter contribute to the human development discourse by illustrating how students are empowered and their capabilities expanded through involvement in SE initiatives.

The above understanding builds on the role of South African universities, as supported by frameworks that articulate the promotion of graduate attributes such as computer literacy, effective communication, and critical thinking that students are expected to acquire in higher education. However, despite these clearly defined goals, a persistent mismatch between graduates' skills and industry expectations continues to raise concerns, as articulated in the study's problem statement (see section 1.3). With the current 11.7 per cent of unemployed being graduates, Statistics South Africa (2025) reports the highest percentage over the past two decades. This suggests the critical role the government and stakeholders need to play is redressing these challenges. This highlights a troubling contradiction between education and employment outcomes (Marwala, 2023). However, O'Connor and Bodicoat (2017) invited us to reflect more critically on how to address these dynamics, putting human development at the centre of all efforts. In their study, they question whether these efforts genuinely support graduate growth or whether they risk exploiting young people. Furthermore, this trajectory raises questions about the university's role, which mandates that graduates be fully prepared to "serve" the world upon graduation. Despite graduates meeting academic requirements, the rise in unemployed or underemployed graduates is stated by Statistics South Africa (2025) and the International Labour Organisation ILO (2023), pointing to a deeper misalignment of higher education and industry demands. This is not only about the gap between what higher education promises and what graduates acquire, but also about the structural realities of the broader economy and labour-market demands. Thus, building on the UNGA (2023), the resolution seeks to narrow such disparities by leveraging available opportunities and supporting grassroots initiatives to create a better world.

A call to action emerges for universities and policymakers to restructure learning environments to meet the ever-changing demands of the world. The findings urge a shift from an exclusive focus on employability to a more holistic model of graduate development that prepares individuals not just for the workplace but also for their roles as active, thoughtful contributors to society. More importantly, this discussion requires deeper epistemic conversations in higher education. It invites us to ask: What kinds of knowledge are HEIs prioritising? Who benefits from this knowledge? And how should they ensure that learning translates into justice, dignity,

and opportunity? Addressing graduate unemployment, therefore, goes beyond simply creating more jobs. It requires honest engagement with the structural and philosophical questions in designing and delivering education.

Furthermore, the students' perspectives highlighted that Enactus is a professional development and networking platform contributing to career readiness. It also reflects the conceptual underpinnings of the study of empowerment and the creation of capabilities that enable students to graduate and contribute to their society (Hockerts et al. 2010). To support these perspectives, Altinay et al. (2022) argued that allowing practical skills, such as project-based learning, has the potential to improve career readiness, which stresses graduate development beyond starting a business or seeking employment, and to foster a more responsible graduate who lives a life they value. This expands the findings of McCarthy (2016), who noted that students are better prepared for dynamic work environments when they engage in experiential learning linked to practical applications. This is because it encourages students and graduates to be adaptable, practice teamwork, and develop leadership and critical thinking skills, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Furthermore, Ban et al. (2017), Booth (2011), Hadjerrouit (2015), Latifi (2021), and Topping et al. (2017) argued that most student learning (60– 80%) happens from practice and peer learning. Platforms that encourage teamwork, community engagement, and help students better understand concepts should be encouraged.

In addition, through students' experiences, Enactus provides networking opportunities that are less common in traditional academic settings. Through their involvement in community-rooted enterprises and participation in national and regional competitions, students gain access to a vast professional network. These networks provide continuous support, often unavailable to those who were not exposed to or involved in SE initiatives. These networks, such as the financial institutions mentioned above, provide students with resources, guidance, and potential career connections upon their graduation.

The findings reveal how the professional relationships developed within this environment provide opportunities (capabilities) for ongoing support and mentoring after graduation. This understanding also links with the importance of sustainability as a pillar of human development (Ul Haq, 1995), and agency (choices) (Sen, 1999) that programmes should be considered to achieve sustainable human development.

There is much discussion in the SE literature about the role of education in fostering civic engagement and social responsibility. Some academics, such as Biesta (2009), argued that the purpose of education goes beyond achieving individuals' aspirations and includes contributing to the public good. Oxenham (2024) argued about the relationship between education and

employment and the (false) hope of job readiness. These discussions suggest that education should be viewed as a platform where students learn beyond their qualifications. It should be viewed as a platform for accumulating skills (professional) and attributes (personal and social) that go beyond thinking and instrumental benefits of education, such as employment. This perspective aligns with Biesta's (2009) views, which link with the CA (Robeyns, 2021), that while students get educated, which can be seen as doing what they value, it should create the potential of living a life they value, should they consider exploring opportunities to fulfil their aspirations.

The students' perspectives show how Enactus projects foster social and environmental responsibility, transforming them into community change agents. This perspective aligns with the HDF's participation, equity, and sustainability pillars. The environmental aspect arises from recycling food waste and developing a green energy generator. The equity and participation aspects emerge through the interaction with rural communities that are often neglected in economic participation. These findings expand on Boni and Walker's (2025) views on universities as institutions for social change by showing how SE, through Enactus, can promote participation, empowerment, equity, and inclusivity through co-created social enterprises.

While scholars such as Al-Qudah et al. (2022), Rawhouser et al. (2019) and Saebi et al. (2019); have presented the effects of SE on economic development, including increased employment and improved incomes. This study's findings provide a multidimensional perspective on how SE affects students' capabilities and enhances collective agency, which is further explored in the following chapter as team choices to act on matters that create social value. The structure of Enactus, which operates as a cross-institutional, interdisciplinary platform, demonstrates the programme's applicability across various academic environments and its potential to facilitate the development of transferable skills and mindsets critical to graduate development. The multidisciplinary nature of Enactus supports inclusion and participation in sustainable human development.

Although students presented Enactus as promoting their personal, social, and professional development, they noted various challenges. These challenges include managing academics and Enactus work, as there is no specified time for them to do Enactus work or their studies. However, the assumption is that students will prioritise their studies. The fact that students highlighted that their success depends on support from various stakeholders suggests that they must take on greater responsibility for mentoring students on time management so that they do not lose focus on their core business while at university.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored students' perspectives on SE's role in enhancing human development by discussing personal, professional, and social development. These dimensions were drawn from the views on enterprises presented in Chapter 5. I, however, acknowledge the learning embedded in less successful ventures, as students hinted at during data collection. Although such enterprises may not have achieved measurable impact at the time, according to Enactus judging criteria,[25] they, nonetheless, offered critical developmental opportunities for students. Several interviewees reflected on projects that failed to move beyond the idea stage, stalled mid-implementation, or ceased due to contextual challenges. Similarly, these successful enterprises went through similar stages, but the students involved exhibited resilience and put into practice what they were doing at the time of the interview. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that Enactus provides a platform enabling three key dimensions of human development. The dimensions discussed above are personal, professional, and social development. These findings augment understanding of sustainable human development by documenting students' views on how SE can contribute to an international human development framework underpinning this study. Having discussed the student perspective on the role of SE in human development, the following chapter presents the capabilities and functionings enhanced through student experiences with Enactus initiatives.

[25] A tool is used by Enactus competition judges who evaluate student enterprises against set parameters such as entrepreneurial action, innovation, quantifiable impact, sustainability, and SDG alignment. Teams are assessed based on the clarity of their presentation, the processes followed to determine needs, the development of entrepreneurial ideas, and the implementation of the enterprise to create a measurable impact (Enactus, 2025).

Chapter 7
Social Entrepreneurial Capabilities Developed Through Engaging in Enactus Initiatives

7.1 Introduction

Higher education institutions can provide platforms for students' experiential learning by enabling SE initiatives to thrive on campuses, where students can engage with real-world challenges and create potentially sustainable enterprises to address them. Various skills and attributes are nurtured in these processes, and social impact is made, thereby contributing to human development. This chapter addresses research objective 2 to examine how SE initiatives influence the development of specific students' capabilities in South African HEIs. To address this objective, the following discussion examines functional capabilities and entrepreneurial agency. Six multidimensional functionings identified from the data are presented along with their corresponding extrapolated capabilities. Also, acknowledging that not all valued functionings were attained, a section will expand on the outcomes students identified as constrained.

The presentation of entrepreneurial agency, which emerged in four dimensions, builds to transformative agency as the bedrock of what motivates students to do what they do to create social impact, while developing the skills and outcomes presented earlier. The discussion section links the findings to the research objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. Furthermore, this chapter interprets the findings within the broader context of human development, underscoring their implications and significance for advancing scholarly understanding of SE's role in fostering capability development and promoting sustainable human development. In doing so, it helps address existing gaps in the literature by demonstrating how Enactus initiatives nurture multidimensional capabilities beyond the classroom. While these multidimensional functionings reflect expanded capabilities, they were often contingent on conversion factors, which will be presented in Chapter 8, including access to resources, mentorship, and stable team structures. These functionings were not uniformly available to all participants or may not have been realised by all, suggesting varied views on the role of Enactus in their personal and professional development.

7.2 Multidimensional functionings and capabilities

The identified multidimensional functionings and extrapolated capabilities are discussed in detail in this section. The functionings and capabilities are multidimensional because no single

factor can capture human well-being. Various personal, social, and environmental factors will be discussed in Chapter 8 and affect what is valued in life. Also, these factors do not operate in isolation; they interrelate, revealing the complexity of people's choices and values.

It is important to note that the capabilities and functionings presented in this chapter are predominantly alumni reflections, reflecting alumni responses that provided the highest "groundedness (number of supporting data references) and density (extent of connections to other codes)", as explained in the methodology Chapter 4. Alumni were better able to articulate detailed reflections on their Enactus participation, which can be viewed through the lens of their temporal distance from their student experiences, enabling them to interpret how the capabilities they (un)developed during their studies were later consolidated into outcomes over time. This does not imply that current students were not acquiring capabilities or functionings; rather, it indicates that many of these capabilities and functionings remain emergent, in formation, or not yet fully realised, and were not clearly articulated at the point of data collection, especially from students. However, in Chapter 6, student voices were more prominent as they could articulate how they (fore)see the role of Enactus in promoting human development. In this chapter, the more substantial presence of alumni narratives, therefore, enhances the chapter's analytical depth by illuminating developmental trajectories. At the same time, student accounts provide insight into capabilities as they are being formed. Together, these perspectives offer a layered understanding of Enactus as a potential developmental space, capturing both immediate capability acquisition and longer-term conversion into functionings, without assuming uniform or guaranteed outcomes across participants.

First, to contextualise functionings and capabilities, Sen (1987:36) defines functioning as an "outcome" or "beings and doings" that one has a reason to value and express. In this context, examples of functionings include implementing entrepreneurial enterprises or being digitally proficient. Robeyns (2003:13) defined capabilities as individuals' opportunities to choose and live valued lives. In this chapter, capabilities, extrapolated from functionings, can think entrepreneurially and innovatively and utilise technological tools proficiently. Table 7.1 provides a summary of the functionings and capabilities which emerged from the research.

Table 7.1 Functionings and capabilities developed through student engagement with Enactus

Functionings (Achievements)	Capabilities (Opportunities)
Implement entrepreneurial enterprises	To be able to be entrepreneurial and to innovate
Lead and enhance collaboration	To be able to lead and enhance collaboration

Apply business knowledge in real-world settings	The capability to undertake experiential, project-based learning
Solving problems and adapting to complex projects	To be able to adapt to challenges and solve problems
Being digitally and technologically proficient	To be able to utilise technological tools proficiently
Creating social impact and sustainability advocacy	To be able to champion sustainability and promote social impact

Source: Author's construct (2025).

The functionings and capabilities presented in Table 7.1 were identified from data based on their groundedness and density. As discussed in Chapter 4, a concept is considered well-grounded if it emerges frequently across various data sources, such as interviews and focus groups. For instance, the more times a code, such as leading or collaborating, appeared in the data, the more grounded it is; hence, it was identified as a significant functioning in this case. Density refers to the richness and interconnectedness of a category within the data, as well as the depth of detail, variations, and linkages a concept has with other sub-themes. For instance, teamwork was linked to multiple other concepts, such as leadership, collaboration, problem-solving, and communication skills, which had a high density as they formed a well-connected web of meaning.

The following discussion examines functionings (attained outcomes) and extrapolates the capabilities they revealed, illustrating how students' experiences translate into opportunities for further growth. This sequence enhances clarity as participants describe how participation led to skill acquisition and expanded skills and outcomes, demonstrating the potential of Enactus to nurture essential skills and social impact.

7.2.1 Implementing entrepreneurial enterprises

The findings show that participants valued the achievement of implementing entrepreneurial projects. For example, to demonstrate this, the following data extracts capture how these were important to students, as one noted:

> We started with crop farming and trained them [beneficiaries] on bee and worm farming, but we mostly implemented crop farming. Then, the following year, we continued with the same project but mainly focused on the bigger picture. As Enactus expanded its vision, it wanted to contribute to communities and help students build sustainable businesses after graduation. So, we started participating in competitions like MTN challenges and forming teams within our organisation in Enactus. Some teams were responsible for building ICT business solutions that MTN would later fund and turn into businesses.

> So, we helped our team get to that point. Thereafter, I started my own enterprise, which was sponsored by Ford Motor Company (Alumni interviewee 13).

The above extract provides a rich context of how students implemented their enterprises and the goals behind the process. To further support this, another alumnus reiterated the following:

> In 2017, our team won the Enactus national competition by achieving above-average impact and went international to sell our ceramic water filters. As part of our portfolio of evidence, using my legal knowledge, I had to draft contracts of sale for customers in Mozambique and sales reporting templates for the beneficiaries, which we presented as evidence of the processes and outcomes of our interventions (Alumni interviewee 12).

The participants indicated that they started participating in MTN and Ford Foundation challenges to secure funding for their enterprises. The students developed entrepreneurial skills and sustainability practices, enhancing their capabilities for long-term self-reliance and social impact beyond university settings. The participants indicated that their enterprise was funded by the Ford Foundation, which demonstrates their efforts to develop entrepreneurial skills to secure funding for their project.

Alumni 13 described how she turned her opportunity into an outcome that helped her team win the competitions. This alumnus indicated that, upon realising the enterprise's growth, they were tasked with designing sales contracts as they entered the international market. What is worth noting here is the Alumni's ability to realise the opportunity to apply the legal theory learnt in class to contribute meaningfully to the enterprises. Furthermore, this alumnus highlighted that the project was collaborative with community members; thus, for sustainability, the students had to conduct training to equip enterprise beneficiaries,[26] who were running the enterprise, to understand business formalities, such as recording transactions, using the designed contracts with customers, and other financial management reporting, such as sales reports for internal use to track what is being sold. The Alumni indicated that this was referred to as the sustainability strategy of their intervention, meaning how they plan to empower beneficiaries to be self-sufficient, even after the students have left, supporting the project.

The above excerpts suggest the students' entrepreneurial agency, showing their ability to identify opportunities for enterprise development and work on improving project outcomes as a critical element in implementing entrepreneurial enterprises. To demonstrate their contribution to business growth, their team showed they had promoted the business in Mozambique, providing evidence of contracts they designed and signed between the customer and the seller. Similarly, the opportunity to teach beneficiaries about crop and bee farming

[26] Individuals, groups, or communities who directly benefit from the outcomes of student intervention in their project. The benefits would include learning business skills, increasing sales revenue, and expanding markets for the project's services and products.

shows that the alumni had reasons to value their work for the project beneficiaries. Thus, having entrepreneurial skills, students position themselves as agents for positive change, sharing their knowledge and assisting small businesses to acquire basic business skills and markets across borders so that businesses can flourish, and valuing the experience of contributing to small business growth, which in turn has the potential to improve the quality and standard of life for the beneficiaries.

Alumni 12 illustrated being able to formulate sales contracts for customers in Mozambique, which enhanced innovative business growth. In this light, Hofst (2024) highlighted that small businesses constantly grow when their owners embrace new challenges and opportunities. In this case, student involvement was an opportunity for the project to grow and for the beneficiaries to be empowered. Pidduck et al. (2023) expressed that entrepreneurial thinking is key in implementing entrepreneurial projects, as seen in the above alumni extracts, where they show their agency in implementing entrepreneurial ideas for the success of the community project they were involved in.

The functioning of "implementing entrepreneurial enterprise" explained above is linked to the capability to think entrepreneurially and innovatively. Thinking entrepreneurially and innovatively involves recognising opportunities, formulating innovative solutions, and applying entrepreneurial reasoning to address social and economic issues. For instance, in the case of the functioning linked to this capability, the participant's ability to use their legal knowledge to benefit the project in meeting basic business requirements, such as having contracts when selling their products. Also, students who implemented the enterprises presented in Chapter 5 demonstrated that they recognised opportunities, such as producing organic manure by breeding soldier flies and red wriggler worms to improve soil fertility and thereby enhance farm outputs. Formulating innovative solutions, such as using WhatsApp and Chatbots for educating and learning to improve reading for meaning. Thus, using these techniques reveals the multidimensionality of each capability and functionings as they develop in response to other outcomes or opportunities. For instance, implementing technological solutions innovatively potentially improves education and food security, as seen in the examples mentioned above. In these processes, students' entrepreneurial thinking is enhanced as they execute these initiatives, encompassing problem-solving, agility, and a proactive mentality crucial for sustainable social development.

In addition to the above, an alumnus revealed that during their time, they introduced their beneficiaries to online selling, a critical entrepreneurial skill in modern business:

> We realised that most cooperatives didn't know about digital marketing, so we introduced computer literacy, teaching them how to advertise their products on platforms like Gumtree and OLX[27] (Alumni Interviewee 1).

As they implemented these projects with their beneficiaries, students would use their knowledge to improve the enterprise, as explained above, by using online selling platforms. Furthermore, as students highlighted the value of stakeholders and institutions in Chapter 6, one of the student mentors noted that they supported and encouraged students to consider multidimensional solutions, such as the enterprises in Chapter 5, which provided various solutions to various problems. For instance, in one enterprise, addressing land pollution improves soil fertility, increases farm yields, and creates employment. The Faculty Advisor noted:

> Having worked with students for over 10 years, we understand the key areas they can focus on to make an impact. For instance, we encouraged students to develop innovative projects, such as food waste recycling, to create sustainable solutions (Faculty Advisor 1).

The alumni and the Faculty Advisor suggested that the entrepreneurial mindset has enabled cooperatives to adopt digital marketing skills. Over the years, these cooperatives had relied on traditional means such as door-to-door selling or waiting in the market for customers. This approach improves market access and is sustainable for digital business, potentially increasing sales and profits with less physical effort.

The Faculty Advisors indicated that they encouraged students to develop environmentally sustainable solutions that are much more relevant to modern economies and to continually strive to eliminate waste by recycling, reducing, and reusing resources. Their advisory role demonstrates how they promoted innovative problem-solving and opportunity recognition, fundamental aspects of entrepreneurial thinking for skills development and creating impact. Thus, complementing the experiences of Ban et al. (2017) and McCarthy (2016), this study contended that knowledge sharing is important in sustainable entrepreneurship. Also, when students practise what they have learnt in class, in providing community solutions to pressing challenges, SE is positioned as a potential strategy in educating entrepreneurial citizens (DeJaeghere, 2017), who develop entrepreneurial and innovative skills and use them not only for individual benefit but also plough back into the community and create impact.

[27] These are online platforms such as Amazon, enabling people to buy and sell goods and services

7.2.2 Leading and enhancing collaboration

Leading and enhancing collaboration is the second functioning identified from the data. While leading and collaborating are seen as distinctive terms, in this context, leading refers to giving direction, mobilising others, making strategic decisions, and driving impact, shared vision and coordination. Enhancing collaboration involves mobilising others, building trust, and executing shared responsibilities for collective impact. The students' perspectives revealed that Enactus potentially fosters student leadership and collaboration, allowing students to develop enterprises and mobilise team members to engage with other stakeholders, such as mentors and funders, in support of a shared vision to create solutions to identified problems.

In the interviews with the Enactus alumni, leadership and collaboration emerged as necessary for team and enterprise success (see Table 4.3). The Enactus leadership method applies an organised, methodical process in which each leader is responsible for the roles assigned to their portfolio. For instance, one interviewee, a project manager, explained their responsibilities to ensure that enterprise plans are implemented in line with the criteria set by Enactus, including documenting reports, capturing how the team contributes to achieving the SDGs, and creating impact. Furthermore, the leadership principles are flexible, responsive, and adaptable to changing community needs, such as renewing opportunities and addressing community-specific challenges.

Twelve of the 16 interviewed students indicated that they joined Enactus in their second year of university enrolment, motivated by the organisation's social mission and practical project involvement. The students stated that they assumed leadership positions, such as project and operations managers, within the team as they came to understand the organisation's objectives and mission. As they became more involved and clearly understood Enactus's objectives. The following excerpts show how two students expressed the leadership roles they undertook and the collaborative processes they participated in:

> As I began to understand how Enactus works, leadership positions were advertised, and I applied for the president position, which I was selected for. This was during the COVID-19 lockdown … so being a leader at this time was demanding, given the need to coordinate people virtually. However, through teamwork and willingness to work together, we pulled the strings together and achieved the impact necessary for our team to be national champions (Alumni interviewee 5).

Leadership skills were essential for keeping the team engaged, working together virtually during COVID, and improving project success. Another student echoed the following:

> I was in my second year when I was nominated as public relations officer, and I think I became the team president after two years. I was technically involved in and oversaw all the team's projects, ensuring the team delivered and maintained the community impact and national championship (Alumni interviewee 18).

The above extracts demonstrate leadership as a dynamic process for Enactus participants, highlighting initiative, strategic planning, and team cooperation. Participants who moved from general membership to leadership positions showed their willingness to use and develop their leadership skills within the team. For alumni who joined the Enactus team in their second year, it highlighted positive growth in becoming leaders, and they further mentioned the roles they took on in the process. The ability to excel in various leadership positions demonstrates the potential to adapt to different contexts and to lead beyond Enactus, underscoring enduring influence on professional and personal development. Milne (2022) argued the importance of ecosystems in higher education that promote leadership skills as they prepare graduates for life outside the university. Therefore, the outcomes of SE in this context empowered graduates to take leadership positions, thereby shaping and enhancing their understanding of working with and leading people.

The capability to lead and enhance collaboration means more than holding a position; it involves having the real opportunity and freedom to influence, mobilise, and sustain collective efforts toward shared goals. This capability develops when students are exposed to leadership roles and supported with spaces to make decisions, coordinate teams, and nurture trust across diverse actors. As presented above, the Faculty Advisor expressed how they contributed to student success by guiding their focus. The functioning of leading and enhancing collaboration is extrapolated as a capability when students repeatedly exercise these roles with confidence, support, and reflection, shaped by conversion factors such as personal, social and environmental factors to be discussed in Chapter 8.

Twelve of the interviewed students highlighted that they joined Enactus in their second year after learning about the goals of Enactus and participating in community projects. After understanding the goals of Enactus, they could take up leadership positions, execute, grow in them, and develop more skills and understanding of the role. These roles involved directing tasks, coordinating collaboratively, bringing together students from different disciplines, engaging with other communities, and managing stakeholder expectations. Thus, one interviewee noted:

> We worked with different people at different levels of life. In this case, we're talking about municipal leadership. You get to be involved with the technocrats. These people actually run the municipality, and you also get to interact with a granny down there in the most remote area … we did many projects that involved, for example, street vendors, where we had to go to identify their challenges, work with them, and then engage different stakeholders such as private businesses, government, and other organisations (Alumni interviewee 15).

Through such experiences, students cultivated transferable skills: listening, decision-making, conflict resolution, and facilitating transfer. Working with community and municipal leaders

helps students understand what it takes to contribute to their communities' development. It also allows them to realise that collaboration makes government systems work, as they also collaborated with the municipality to provide a much-needed service, such as training street vendors on basic business practices. This could improve their micro businesses and expand their economic freedoms. As an Alumni interviewee, 5 noted that:

> You can't lead without learning to work with people from different spaces and people with different opinions.

The alumni perspective suggests that first, one must learn to work with people to lead. Also, it shows that leadership is not an isolated authority but a relational practice. Therefore, when students repeatedly lead and co-create in real-world projects, they do not simply perform a role; they expand their capability to lead and collaborate meaningfully across settings beyond the university and their qualification focus.

Leadership and collaboration were views expressed by both alumni and students as they shared their experiences in their Enactus journeys. Ndou (2021) argued that leadership and collaboration cultivate decision-making skills and effective communication in SE. They further enhance the developing skills and attributes necessary for a life they would value in and outside the university. In this regard, Montgomery et al. (2012) emphasised that leadership within SE models extends beyond organisational management to shaping broader societal outcomes. The findings suggest that when students develop the capability to lead and enhance collaboration, they are positioned to act with purpose and influence their networks.

7.2.3 Applying business knowledge in real-world settings

Applying business knowledge in practical contexts is a fundamental outcome valued by participants. The findings show that it allows students to connect theory to practice, which means what they learn in class is being put into practice; for instance, the following excerpt from Enactus interviewees 1 and 14 shows the value attained by participants:

> I participated in the marketing of the candles. I'd never marketed anything. We went on a two-day door-to-door marketing campaign. I developed marketing skills, approaching people, informing them of the product, and explaining how it can help them. It was my first time engaging in this level of business communication (Alumni interviewee 14).

As the above alumnus appreciated that her involvement expanded her skills beyond her studies (Youth Studies), she noted that the exposure gave her a basic understanding of what marketing entails. The expression shows a sense of fulfilment in these entrepreneurial activities. On another note, an alumnus recalled how his lecturer challenged him to develop solutions for small and medium enterprises in the city:

> Our lecturer, the primary Faculty Advisor of Enactus at the time, came to us and said, "You have an assignment: assist struggling businesses in town." You will act as consultants... She obtained the database from the City of Johannesburg. Then she just gave it to us, saying, 'Find out the problems, do the analysis, and then propose the solutions.' ... We developed business plans, marketing plans, and financial strategies to support these small businesses (Alumni interviewee 1).

Thus, Enactus allowed students to learn new skills and engage with real-world issues. For instance, Enactus Alumni 14 emphasised the development of practical marketing skills through a door-to-door initiative, describing it as their first experience of such a business activity. The participant further noted that this process enhanced their self-assurance and improved their communication skills, as it involved convincing customers to see value in the products they were selling. Alumni 1 stressed that their Faculty Advisor challenged them to think outside the box by assigning a practical exercise. The Faculty Advisor, who was their lecturer at the time, demonstrated that he believed students could provide solutions to the pressing challenges faced by small enterprises if given the opportunity. This approach shows how the Faculty Advisor's approach was rooted in developing essential problem-solving, business analysis, and consulting abilities for students as they utilised their knowledge to support underperforming enterprises in the city where the university is located.

These findings reflect students' power to empower their communities if given such opportunities. In the process, they sharpened their business and leadership skills as expressed in Section 7.2.1. Transforming business knowledge into fundamental entrepreneurial skills and enhancing community development is critical to improving human development through SE. Santos et al. (2019) argued that because SE focuses on mission with purpose, it becomes an empowerment approach to address community needs while building students' resilience and leadership with empathy. Furthermore, Hofste (2024) described learning business knowledge as an entrepreneurial ability, especially for non-commercial students. These findings related to participants' expressions that doing marketing or helping the business in town was their first encounter in Enactus, aimed at contributing to the success of these enterprises. In this process, students synthesised knowledge, developed skills, and engaged in critical thinking to understand how to regulate the factors affecting a business's performance, as presented to them. Thus, through SE initiatives, the participants should learn to create a positive impact.

The capability to undertake experiential project-based learning emerged from the functioning discussed above. The participants' remarks illustrate their ability to engage in project-based learning by applying the knowledge they learnt in class to address real-world business challenges. Also, as noted above, some students were involved in these activities for the first time, meaning the knowledge and process were entirely new to them. However, their expression and experience were valuable as they narrated.

Alumni 10 emphasised applying accounting and management academic knowledge to Enactus initiatives within their responsibility as vice-president of operations:

> I studied accounting, so many of the business and management modules proved helpful in Enactus. I used that knowledge when I stepped into the Vice-President of Operations role (Alumni Interviewee 10).

The above expression underscores the importance of project-based learning, which is critical to SE in enhancing students' skills for human development. Various participants alluded to this, showing how their engagement with Enactus opened multiple opportunities. For instance, five of the interviewed alumni indicated that their Enactus experience influenced their current employment. Two of these were project coordinators, who attributed their appointment to their exposure to Enactus roles that enhanced their project management, communication, and presentation skills. On the same note, two were working at a university entrepreneurship hub, while one was serving as a programme manager at an international organisation.

The student experiences shared above showed that applying business knowledge in the real world enhanced students' skills and experiences, which later translated into creating employment opportunities and becoming employable. From their perspective, they all indicated how Enactus promoted active involvement, problem-solving, and leadership development, which were crucial elements of project-based learning, allowing students to merge theoretical concepts with practical experience, essential skills for professional advancement.

Enhancing project-based learning capability is crucial in what Allais (2022) considered a necessary systemic transformation for sub-Saharan universities in promoting skills for industrialisation. In this case, fostering innovation and impact in the communities that students serve, as alluded to by Altinay et al. (2022) noting that they further enhanced individual freedoms and choices regarding employment or self-employment.

7.2.4 Solving problems and adapting to complex environments

When engaging with participants, what became apparent was that their calling was to address challenges and adjust to complex projects to solve problems. These are fundamental aspects that enable individuals to manage uncertainty and devise solutions. The findings suggest Enactus facilitates this by empowering students to recognise community challenges, develop and implement solutions, and collaborate with various stakeholders. Attesting to the above, one student during the FGD 1 noted:

> As entrepreneurs, if we hit a brick wall due to bureaucracy, should we consider what we can do better? How do we bypass such challenges? It all starts with the track record. We may go to the varsity and ask for support, but they'll ask us: What's your track record? Until there's a convincing track record, we cannot move forward (FGD 1 student 3).

The above excerpt shows the student's determination to build a strong track record of solving challenges. This was linked to getting more support from the university, as they will be seen as relevant. Furthermore, an alumnus mentions the process they go through to what they argued as an "implementation skill":

> I do not know if there's a specific skill called implementation skill, but I'm demonstrating here that you assess complex challenges. What do you think is the best way? And without hesitation, you go to the ground and say Let's go and try this thing, and you do it (Alumni Interviewee 15).

The excerpt shows how the alumni used entrepreneurial agility to manoeuvre through real-world challenges. The FGD 1 student 3 emphasised adaptive problem-solving, explaining how students critically evaluated and devised strategies to navigate bureaucratic obstacles, which they alluded to as linked to impact in securing support, especially in institutions that will not be convinced by an organisation without results in its enterprises. Alumni interviewee 15 demonstrated the actual application, in which students evaluate, determine, and execute actions that demonstrate the ability to translate knowledge into concrete results, which is vital for entrepreneurial success.

The findings revealed problem-solving and implementation as valued functionings. Sen (1999) highlighted the value of applying the skills to tangible outcomes, which are shown in this instance where the participants identified problems, such as challenges to pollution, and the inability of primary learners to learn for meaning, in the enterprise presented in Chapter 5. These findings further show the importance of adaptive entrepreneurship, the ability to adjust enterprise approaches to changing contexts, challenges, and emerging opportunities. Zahra and Wright (2016) presented adaptive entrepreneurship as essential in addressing social problems, which come in different forms and in different contexts.

The corresponding capability of being able to adapt to challenges and to be flexible for the above functioning suggested that unforeseen circumstances, such as COVID-19, enabled students to adjust and be street-wise, which Sternberg (2019) described as adaptive intelligence, awareness of real-world situations, and how COVID-19 disrupted the world and introduced the new normal of constrained movements and working environments. During the interviews and FGDs, several students highlighted COVID-19 as a challenge they had to adapt to when travelling was banned, yet their enterprises had to continue operating. Despite the new normal of constrained movement introduced by COVID-19, students had to adjust and find alternative ways to operate. One interviewee stressed the following:

> We learned to adapt to challenges like COVID-19, modifying how we did our work in our enterprise to continue working from home and working to create impact (Alumni Interviewee 4).

This was a testament to the adaptive thinking that emerged amid the pandemic's constraints. To add on how students adapted to challenges in their enterprises, one student stressed the following during the FGD 2:

> Working with peers, some may not be supportive or responsive to tasks. So, we had to go to all four campuses, meet with project managers, gather information, compile reports, and submit them to the Enactus team. That taught me team management and communication skills (Alumni Interviewee 1).

What was expressed by Alumni Interviewee 3 shows the capability of being able to adapt to challenges and to be flexible. The challenge in this case was the unsupportive peers, and the adaptability strategy adopted was to visit their campuses to gather the required information to prepare the report. These abilities and the modification of work patterns to align with the new norms reflect students' skills and agency to pursue what they value through the Enactus space. Adomako and Ahsan (2022) highlighted that entrepreneurial passion without flexibility can lead to failure, especially in this ever-changing work environment.

Similarly, Dheer & Lenartowicz (2019) argued that mental flexibility is crucial for entrepreneurs as the business terrain frequently changes without notice. Additionally, Ndlovu and Lefera (2024:7) reported that, in line with these dynamics, students refer to themselves as "hustle-preneurs", meaning they are driven by personal motivation and the ability to adapt to prevailing circumstances. This shows that through these SE initiatives, students grow and embody adaptability and flexibility in their entrepreneurial endeavours. These studies highlighted critical abilities developed in students and alumni, including adaptability and flexibility in complex environments. For instance, the constrained working conditions during COVID-19 led to the adoption of remote work to keep the enterprise running. Moreover, alumni sentiments suggest that a student in a leadership position requires a proactive mindset to lead and handle unforeseen circumstances, so the team does not crumble when one member fails to deliver their mandate.

7.2.5 Being digitally and technologically proficient

In a dynamic, digitally driven environment, technological proficiency is imperative. Individuals and institutions that do not adapt to emerging technologies risk marginalisation as the use and application of technology swiftly change the global environment. During interviews and FGDs, digital and technological proficiency emerged as a fundamental skill for navigating the SE space. An alumnus gave a record of their colleague who has tapped into the use of technology in teaching and learning:

> Among other skills we learnt during our engagement with Enactus enterprises was the use of technology, which helped us to work smart, not hard. One team member is now registered for a master's degree. He's working, has a job, and has started two companies: an IT company that creates websites and LenoKids,

> which focuses on technology in education. He was selected to present his work in Switzerland among doctors and professors because of his innovative approach to education technology (Alumni interviewee 16).

This excerpt shows an example of an Enactus Alumni growing in the field of technology and being internationally recognised for his efforts; one of the enterprises he cofounded, LenoKids, was presented in Chapter 5. The alumni to whom Alumni 16 referred had already participated in the interview, approving the above notion:

> We initially wanted to teach young people how to code. We identified a school, planned practical lessons, and then pivoted to a virtual gaming centre due to COVID-19. We worked with the IT department, ensuring that coding knowledge could be applied in developing African Indigenous games and helping students commercialise their skills through game development (Alumni interviewee 10).

While various excerpts from the students and alumni highlighted the importance of adopting technology as young entrepreneurs, the two alumni above provided a connecting narrative. The efforts to use technology, especially AI, in teaching and learning in their enterprise were recognised internationally.

On a similar note, one of the reports reviewed, quoted in Chapter 5, section 5.2.3.1, triangulates the accounts presented above, showing that students in Enactus valued their proficiency in technology and were eager to educate others, underscoring the importance of access and proficiency in information technology. As Alumni 10 indicated that their enterprises had the potential to improve digital skills, sustainable support frameworks from institutions were essential to their sustainability. Institutionally, the Alumni recorded negotiations with the IT department to support their initiatives. In Chapter 5, the reviewed report stated that stakeholder support for scaling these initiatives was essential, providing financial resources and mentorship to entrepreneurs as they expand. These collaborations showed the importance of sustaining these outcomes through partnership and support.

Being digitally and technologically proficient is a valuable capability that enables individuals to use digital tools effectively in their enterprises. This was articulated by the participants, who not only valued this skill but also actively applied it in their enterprises. For instance, the LenoKids enterprise discussed in Chapter 5 showed how students used Chatbots and AI to develop and enhance their knowledge and innovative thinking skills by simplifying English with AI applications to facilitate easy understanding by primary school learners. The alumni also shared examples from Johannesburg, where they introduced digital tools like Google Sheets for budgeting and Trello for managing cooperative tasks and workflows. Although the students often framed their stories in terms of mentoring beneficiaries and serving customers, their efforts also helped them improve essential skills, such as project management, digital

implementation, and leadership, while working with others to grow and sustain their enterprises.

Adding on the above, Mihai et al. (2022) expressed technological proficiency as the ability to master relevant enabling technologies in various contexts. This includes, for instance, becoming an expert in using software, applications, and hardware. It further highlights the effective utilisation of digital tools such as AI and online stores, as well as the implementation of technological solutions to enhance the efficiency of the designed outcomes. Further suggesting that technological proficiency should go beyond awareness of emerging technologies to understanding their application, and Nguyen et al. (2023) emphasised the need for ethical use and application across diverse business contexts; for instance, how LenoKids leveraged the value of AI to improve efficiency and learning delivery.

7.2.6 Creating social impact and sustainability advocacy

Reviewing Enactus reports, it was clear that the students' enterprises should create social impact and advocate sustainability, guided by international goals such as the SDGs. Saebi et al. (2019) suggested that creating social impact and sustainability advocacy is fundamental to sustainable development, setting SE at the forefront of this conversation. Similarly, the findings in this study show how the participants aimed to create social impact and advocate for sustainable economic, social, and environmental practices. As expressed by Faculty Advisor 1, they focus their advisory roles on ensuring that students' enterprises support the university's community engagement goals and contribute to the SDGs. The following excerpts show how participants view the importance of sustainability practices and social impact:

> We align our universities' community engagement goals with the SDGs, and that's how we guide our students to find projects within that framework. It must be a win-win-win situation: a win for the university, a win for the community through poverty alleviation or job creation, and a win for students by ensuring they gain skills and build successful businesses (Faculty Advisor 1).

While the Faculty Advisor provided a strategic overview of Enactus and its contribution to student development, it was emphasised that the goal is not only to enhance student skills but also to ensure the sustainability of the enterprises. This was linked to aligning with the university's broader social impact mandate through community engagement initiatives. Supporting the Faculty Advisor's views, Alumni 9 highlighted that:

> The only way we will survive in the future is through sustainable social innovation that generates income and protects the planet. We need policies and financial support to help student entrepreneurs navigate this space. broadly ensuring that their businesses contribute to the economy, their lives, while making the world a better place to live in.

The above extracts show how students are supported in aligning their initiatives with university goals; for instance, the Faculty Advisor indicated how they guided their students to develop enterprises that align with the university's community engagement goals and the SDGs. Doing so helps students contribute to poverty alleviation, job creation, and quality education, as shown by the enterprises presented in Chapter 5. Enactus Alumni 9 and most FGD participants indicated that sustainability is key because when a social business grows, it should create jobs, empower students and beneficiaries simultaneously, and reduce harm on the planet. This notion was explicitly presented in the Enactus reports, showing how student enterprises were being evaluated. Thus, reflecting on the Vermi Village and Bio ProFly enterprises presented in Chapter 5, they were the best enterprises with the potential to have an impact in Enactus South Africa between 2022 and 2023. This was because they embodied the elements of sustainability, profitability, environmental protection, and social value creation that define the best enterprises.

The capability to champion sustainability and promote social impact is extrapolated from the functioning presented above. The following excerpt from a participant shows how being able to create social impact creates opportunities for practising and teaching sustainable agriculture through their enterprises:

> Our focus shifted to agriculture and sustainability. We started a project called Village Farm [Now Vermi Village], where we trained our beneficiaries on crop, bee, and worm farming (Alumni interviewee 12).

It is worth noting that students involved in SE actively embrace knowledge sharing with their beneficiaries. This practice is central to their impact and contributes meaningfully to their skills development; after all, they must understand what they teach. As outlined in Chapter 4, not all team members initially possessed knowledge of the enterprises they joined. However, their curiosity and willingness to learn allowed them to take on these unfamiliar challenges and grow into ambassadors of progress and change. One student from the FGDs remarked:

> Creating a culture of knowledge-sharing ensures continuous development. Enactus is likened to a 'river of life'; it nurtures constant growth and survival along the river (Enactus) ecosystem (FGD 3 student 4).

This quote captures how students see themselves not only as learners but as catalysts for social impact, promoting sustainability through a culture of collaboration, adaptability, and continuous learning.

Alumni 12 and a student from FGD3 highlighted students' skills in sustainability initiatives, such as the enterprise they participated in, which fosters environmental and economic sustainability. The knowledge-sharing culture within Enactus, as indicated by Student interviewee 5, supported ongoing development, reflecting the capability to sustain impact-driven enterprises and ensure long-term community and environmental well-being. A

systematic literature review by Adams et al. (2015) found that SE contributes to advancing sustainability-oriented innovation. This suggests creating environmentally friendly initiatives such as those presented in Chapter 5.

7.3 Unlocking barriers to the realisation of untapped functionings and capabilities

Discussions with students and alumni revealed a complex interplay of barriers affecting the sustainability of student enterprises, many of which were highly valued during their university studies and remained hopeful to grow beyond graduation. Several students spoke to the difficulty of securing funding after leaving university, highlighting that while Enactus offers support structures and funding channels for currently registered students, graduates are often left without a clear pathway to continue their enterprises. This creates a massive divide between the momentum built during Enactus participation and the reality of sustaining enterprise work in post-university life.

Several students and alumni shared that support from corporate partners decreased once they graduated. The alumni stressed that during their time in Enactus, companies were willing to fund and mentor student-led projects, often through the university. However, after leaving campus, the alumni found themselves without access to those same opportunities. These perspectives suggest that corporations prefer structure, credibility, and someone to account to, which, in this case, the university and Enactus served as a shield for students' access to these opportunities. Without the university's backing, the participants felt overlooked, despite having innovative ideas and a proven track record. This gap left many feeling that good projects ended when they left university, not because they lacked potential, but because the system was not set up to support them beyond that point.

Mentorship structures within Enactus were also viewed as uneven. Several participants observed that support was disproportionately directed toward students in formal leadership roles. For instance, there was a series of indications that over the past decade, Enactus often focused on developing student leaders, such as team presidents and project managers, while other committed team members have remained on the margins of these learning and development opportunities. Although students saw this as discriminatory, Enactus (2025) reports suggested that selecting student leaders for mentorship opportunities is key, as these individuals are seen as the key levers for success and have formal responsibilities and the ability to influence team success; therefore, they need support where possible.

The students also described the challenges of sustaining enterprise momentum amid the continuous nature of the Enactus team leadership. Annual leadership changes often lead to

shifting priorities and the premature abandonment of early-stage enterprises. As one alumnus reflected:

> Because of the cycle and the need to elect a new executive team every year, they sometimes fall into the trap of creating a new project each year. In August, new executive members are appointed, while they still try to figure out their roles, it's October. They have to study for exams ... then they come back in March with not much time to coordinate the enterprises ... and they need to report on these enterprises monthly and be ready to present in July competitions (Alumni interviewee 7).

The alumni stressed the critical challenges of one-year leadership tenure, coupled with students' responsibilities for Enactus and their studies, which leave them little time to engage in and focus on developing these enterprises. Although the alumni's views were valid, there were discrepancies compared to the successful enterprise presented in Chapter 5, as they spanned the years during which the same students managed them. These views suggested that the success of a student enterprise relies on the commitment of its members, regardless of changes in team leaders. However, another student brought a different view of the barriers to realisation, untapped functions and capabilities:

> Support from stakeholders is not coming on board as we expected... We really relied on the Department of Agriculture... but they were checking in on their own time... regarding our timeline in relation to Enactus deadlines, we would fall behind. The project would be significantly affected (Student interviewee 14).

The above sections have focused on students' beings and doings, the functionings they value, and the capabilities cultivated through their participation in Enactus. I have also presented the valued but not attained functionings, illustrating students' conversion challenges. The following section turns to entrepreneurial agency as a potential catalyst for overcoming such constraints, unlocking broader social impact, and enhancing skills.

7.4 Entrepreneurial agency as a catalyst for enhancing student skills and creating social impact

This section builds on the above discussion of functionings and capabilities. This section presents and discusses entrepreneurial agency as a catalyst for social impact. First, according to Sen (1999:18), agency is understood as "an individual's freedom to do and achieve goals or values one regards as important". However, this chapter combines entrepreneurship and agency, as described by McMullen et al. (2021:1201) as an "individual's freedom to act innovatively". In this motivation, ability, opportunity, institutional support, and process skills are present and combined. In other words, this means when a person has freedom to be creative and take action, when they have the drive (motivation), the skills (ability), the chance (opportunity), the support from stakeholders or systems (institutional support), and the know-how to get things done (process skills), all are working together. The emphasis here is that this

social entrepreneurial agency goes beyond the focus of traditional business ventures, which often focus on profit maximisation over creating social impact by leveraging resources, networks, and creative and innovative thinking.

Knitting this back to Sen's broader idea of agency as shaping one's future by making the choices one values while contributing to societal well-being. Entrepreneurial agency becomes a powerful means through which students not only imagine better futures but also actively create them, mobilising their ideas, skills, and networks to drive change that matters to both them and their communities.

In understanding entrepreneurial agency, the data revealed it to be multidimensional and interconnected, with four dimensions identified. These dimensions are individual, collective, relational and transformative. Entrepreneurial agency and its interconnectedness are presented in Figure 7.1.

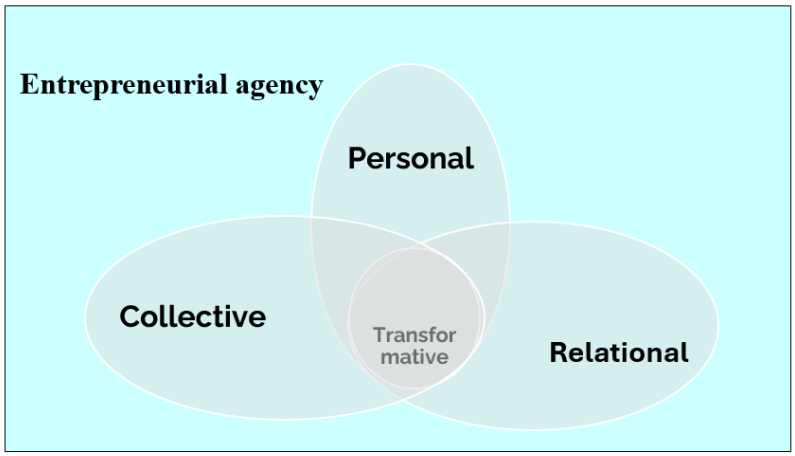


Figure 7.1 Interconnectedness dimensions of entrepreneurial agency

Source: Author's construct (2025)

Figure 7.1 illustrates the interconnected nature of entrepreneurial agency dimensions by showing how the personal, collective, and relational dimensions overlap to produce transformative outcomes. Each dimension plays a different role but is closely linked and often works together in SE practice.

7.4.1 Individual agency: Expanding individual capabilities to achieve functionings

The cultivation of agency among Enactus students can be understood through the interaction of capabilities (potential/opportunities) and functionings (realised outcomes), where Sen (2000) argued that having capabilities is not enough; one must have the agency to convert capabilities into functionings. Thus, personal agency creates conditions for students to cultivate self-

confidence, leadership, and decision-making skills, manifesting in skills such as public speaking and the initiation of entrepreneurial enterprises.

The students and alumni interviewed provided various experiences. For example, the alumni's growth in Enactus illustrates the evolution from skill development, such as being digitally proficient and able to apply business knowledge in a real-world setting, leading to professional success in their enterprise. The narratives above showed alumni that they improved their leadership, decision-making, and public speaking skills as they progressed from general members to Enactus president. The alumni further indicated that these experiences ultimately led them to obtain a community engagement officer role at a university. This validates the potential of Enactus to cultivate leadership skills and career preparedness through practical engagement.

The enterprises presented in Chapter 5 showed that students develop agency through experiential learning, decision-making, and leadership within their entrepreneurial initiatives. Their freedom to engage in problem-solving, mobilising resources, and implementing sustainable business models reflects the strengthening of their agency. In this way, individual agency in entrepreneurship goes beyond just starting a business; it is also about personal growth, shaping society, and preparing to lead in complex, changing environments.

7.4.2 Collective agency: Team-based efforts toward social impact

Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019) describes collective agency as the ability of groups to collaborate to enhance freedoms and attain common objectives that individuals may find challenging to achieve independently. In this context, for instance, the participants revealed that their collective efforts collaborating with various corporations and government institutions to develop and scale their enterprises are presented in Chapter 5. For example, to train NGOs in fundraising, assist them in complying with government regulations, such as legal registration with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, and provide institutional support where possible.

It was also found that students cultivate collective agency by jointly planning, executing, and maintaining their enterprises, addressing food waste, landfill issues, and quality education through Vermi Village, Bio ProFly, and LenoKids, respectively. The discussions with participants further revealed that collective agency is evident in partnerships with stakeholders, such as Interstate Bus Lines, which provide guidance and resources to student enterprises, thereby enhancing students' capacity for action. While students had varying views on the contributions alumni made, alumni interviews highlighted how they supported their teams in their various leadership positions. Varying student views alongside alumni contributions

suggest that collective agency is dynamic and negotiated. This shows how roles, influence, and team collaboration evolve, shaped by perceptions, experience, and the level of relational trust between students and alumni.

7.4.3 Relational agency: Learning and growth through networks

Relational agency, unlike collective and individual agency, is shaped not only by working within a team but through interactions across broader networks that extend beyond the immediate student group. For instance, when students and alumni in LenoKids enterprise co-created the online learning platforms with the commitment of the parents and the Department of Basic Education. Thus, drawing from Sen's (1989) understanding of relational agency is influenced by the relationships that are formed and how they affect others. Heikkurinen et al. (2021) further argued that sustainable development depends on recognising that progress is relational, built through trust, respect, and mutual benefit.

In this study, relational agency emerges through relationships developed among students, institutions and other stakeholders. These connections show that agency is not isolated but woven into a broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. These relationships offer more than support; they create spaces for learning, guidance, and shared accountability. Through this engagement, students transferred knowledge and expanded their capabilities by engaging with real-world systems and policies.

Unlike collective agency, which means acting as a group with a sense of joint ownership and solidarity, relational agency is about students acting together through mutual team coordination and understanding. For instance, in a situation where students plan a workshop on financial literacy and invite ABSA to deliver it to share expert knowledge. Whilst collective agency points to various teams joining forces to advocate, for instance, the inclusion of SE experiences as part of their graduate success. These two forms of agency are intertwined, and they both expand students' capabilities for participation and social impact. This is a key dimension in the Social Entrepreneurship capability framework discussed in Chapter 9.

7.4.4 Transformative agency: Linking purpose, action for systemic change

Transformative agency emerges at the intersection of individual, collective, and relational agency. Pavel and Isak (2022) argue for considering the value of transformational agency, asking whether it can deliver the kinds of social and economic change education promises. This critique offers a valuable lens for understanding how, in this study, individual, collective, and relational agency combine to enable transformation beyond the self. The relationship between these forms of agency suggests that transformative agency is the capacity of individuals or

groups to challenge, reshape, and improve existing social, economic, or institutional conditions to exercise their freedoms and entirely create meaningful change. For instance, LenoKids realised that primary leaders had difficulties reading English for comprehension and meaning, despite having access to schools. This became an opportunity for them to design a learning platform using AI and a social media platform accessible on their parents' mobile phones. Through these initiatives, students challenged the traditional belief that the government should solve these problems. The enterprise created pathways for parents to support their children's learning when not in school, fulfilling White's (1905:351) argument that home is the first school for children, where parents are the first teachers to cultivate discipline, love, and character.

Student narratives illustrate how agency becomes transformative when personal drive, teamwork, and stakeholder collaboration converge toward broader human development goals. For instance, in the Vermi Village enterprise, students' actions show that they move beyond collective or relational engagement. Their actions tackle waste reduction, promote sustainable agriculture, and support income generation, especially among marginalised youth and women. By training others in vermiculture, students transfer knowledge and expand livelihood and inclusion opportunities. This becomes a transformation in practice, showing how turning small initiatives into platforms for environmental and economic change contributes to human development.

Figure 7.1 shows the relationship of the entrepreneurial agency dimensions that emerged in this study. This illustration relates to Tiwari's (2021) convergence framework. Tiwari's framework suggests that individual, collective, and relational agency converge to create social impact. At this convergence, which in this case is referred to as transformative agency, the dimensions of personal, relational, and collective entrepreneurial agency intersect and have the potential to contribute to exceptional societal change. While Tiwari's convergence framework was developed in the broader field of human development, drawing on her studies in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, in this study, the relationship is derived from an entrepreneurial context in South African higher education. This study shows the potential of SE when supported to contribute to broader empowerment and participation in advancing economic dimensions, such as creating employment opportunities, and social dimensions, such as quality education for sustainable human development.

7.5 Discussion

This section discusses capabilities developed through SE's transformative potential, using Enactus enterprise lenses. It linked the functionings and capabilities presented earlier to

entrepreneurial agency, SE context, and broader human development objectives. The findings presented here suggest that Enactus has the potential to foster students' development of multidimensional capabilities. The capabilities discussed in this chapter ranged from entrepreneurial thinking to leadership, adaptability, digital proficiency, and collaboration. These are achieved through experiential learning, project management, and stakeholder engagement. As Sen (1999) emphasised, capabilities require both opportunity and agency, the freedom to convert potential into action. Through participants' perspectives, Enactus platforms facilitate this conversion by embedding students in real-world problem-solving and in various leadership roles within their respective teams.

It was clear in this chapter presentation that students' views were not as deep as those of alumni. This is because students often perceive their learning incrementally. Whilst alumni reflected on deeper growth in leadership, critical thinking, and innovation, which is usually more evident post-university. This understanding is related to DeJaeghere's (2018) argument that the whole meaning of educational capability development becomes visible over time and in different life stages. Alumni could reflect on how Enactus was shaping their personal and professional trajectories.

The results showed that students develop three types of entrepreneurial agency: individual, collective, and relational. Students show individual agency when they initiate their enterprises, such as LenoKids and Vermi Village, and use their business skills to make a real difference. Collectively, the students run their businesses and assign each other responsibilities to execute the collective enterprise. They share responsibilities and help each other learn in this way. In terms of relational agency, the study showed that students work out partnerships with stakeholders such as MTN and the South African National Youth Development Agency. These corporations help them advance their enterprises, providing resources and opportunities to grow and achieve greater social impact. When these come together, they create transformative agency, where students help themselves and the community, and they mostly bring about changes in the system.

However, students' narratives showed that the ability to realise capabilities is uneven. They are personal and structural issues affecting this. For instance, students in formal leadership roles, such as enterprise leaders, often gain different access to mentorship, networks and visibility compared to general members. On another note, personal motivation and willingness to commit and be visible also provide individuals with opportunities for learning and growth. For instance, Enactus South Africa recognises exceptional leaders based on their portfolio of evidence of leadership roles.

Despite showing initiative, other members are reported to have remained on the margins of key development opportunities. This inequality reflects what Robeyns (2017) and Walker (2012) call conversion factors, conditions that mediate whether capabilities become functionings; in this case, the conversion factors become constraining. Those not in leadership positions felt that their opportunities were constrained. What is critical to note is that everyone on the team has equal opportunities to take leadership positions; only their drive and willingness (personal conversion factors) to pursue leadership opportunities matter, which later open up additional opportunities, such as access to mentorship and exposure. It is also worth noting that, in addition to personal factors, social factors such as institutional support and access to mentorship enhance opportunities within the Enactus environment.

Moreover, alumni narratives revealed systemic constraints after graduation. While Enactus offers a structured support system during university, this support system dissolves upon students' graduation. The assumption is that students will have made the most of these opportunities to grow and build networks that could help them in the world beyond the university. However, many enterprises exit university in their infancy when students are still grasping their business concepts and understanding how the corporate world works. For instance, enterprises such as Vermi Village and Bio ProFly risk losing momentum without funding, mentorship, or institutional support. Alumni stressed the need for long-term support mechanisms, alumni networks, entrepreneurship hubs, and funding pipelines to ensure continuity and scale. Nonetheless, different perspectives remain when recommending the most ideal approach to sustain student enterprises. For instance, some funding models prioritise projects that align with a corporate social responsibility approach, potentially sidelining high-impact initiatives that do not serve donor interests or are poorly developed. Additionally, annual leadership transitions within Enactus disrupt project continuity, underscoring the need for longer-term planning structures.

Innovation and adaptability stand out as core dimensions of student capability development. Students who participated in this study showed resourcefulness during the pandemic, transitioning initiatives like LenoKids to WhatsApp-based learning platforms. Furthermore, students leveraged partnerships with funders such as the Ford Foundation and MTN for funding and training opportunities. These collaborations enhance enterprise strategies for new contexts, such as those imposed by COVID-19, remote work, and the shift to virtual work methods. These findings echo Lal et al.'s (2023) work on resilience and adaptability as essential social capabilities for sustainable entrepreneurship in the modern-day, ever-changing world.

The findings above confirm that Enactus is a relatively good space for capability development. Through experiential learning, collaborative action, and entrepreneurial practice, students

advance agency to enhance their human development potential. Yet, sustaining these gains requires deliberate institutional strategies, post-graduation pathways, and equitable access to enhancing conditions that promote the achievement of graduate attributes.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the capabilities developed in students as they engage in SE initiatives through Enactus. The chapter first identified six functionings, outcomes of participating in SE through Enactus lenses; from these, capabilities were extrapolated. This chapter responds to the objective of assessing how SE initiatives influence the development of specific students' capabilities in South African HEIs. The chapter further discussed entrepreneurial agency, which also manifested in four dimensions: personal, relational, collective and transformative. From these dimensions, it was seen that they all interplay, do not work in isolation, and that the failure or achievement of one affects how the others will develop. This relationship was linked to Tiwari's (2021) convergence framework, which discussed the broader relationship between agency and drew on studies in Africa and Asia. In both narratives, it becomes clear that agency evolves and is interdependent.

The following presents and discusses the conversion factors that influence the attainment of the functionalities and capabilities presented in this chapter. These factors offer essential context for understanding how institutional and structural conditions affect the transformative potential of SE initiatives in higher education.

Chapter 8
Understanding Conversion Factors Affecting Student Capabilities and Functionings in Social Entrepreneurship

8.1 Introduction

This chapter explores three dimensions of conversion factors that enhance or constrain the development of valued capabilities and the achievement of meaningful functionings among students engaged in SE through Enactus. As established in Chapter 7, students do not automatically benefit from opportunities and resources; instead, their ability to convert these into real achievements is influenced by personal, social, and environmental conditions, collectively known as conversion factors (Robeyns, 2017). Guided by research objective 3, which identifies the factors that promote or constrain the effectiveness of Enactus in enhancing students' capabilities within South African HEIs, this chapter shows how these contextual conditions affect students' SE experiences. The thematic dimensions for conversion factors are drawn from Robeyns' framework, grouped into three interrelated domains:

- **Social conversion factors**, which encompass the support structures and influence of stakeholders, partnerships, socio-economic conditions, and sociocultural dynamics within the academic and community ecosystems.
- **Personal conversion factors** include cognitive and non-cognitive attributes. These personal traits affect how students respond to opportunities and overcome challenges as they initiate and lead entrepreneurial initiatives.
- **Environmental conversion factors** refer to physical and infrastructural aspects such as access to land, reliable internet, workspace, or geographic proximity to markets and collaborators, all of which impact the feasibility and sustainability of student-led enterprises.

Informed by the students' narratives, this chapter unpacks these factors using examples from the diverse Enactus projects presented in Chapter 5. The analysis reveals that these conversion factors do not operate in isolation but often intersect to influence students' capabilities to innovate, collaborate, and drive social change. The following sections detail these three domains and how they affect students' capacity to transform entrepreneurial inputs into valued outcomes.

8.2 Conversion factors affecting the development of student capabilities and functionings

To provide context, the conversion factors discussed here are presented in Table 8.1. The table lists the subcategories for each domain, along with brief definitions.

Table 8.1 Conversion factors affecting the formation and realisation of valued student capabilities and functionings

Conversion factor category	Sub factor categories
Social	Stakeholders – Individuals, groups, or institutions that have an interest in, influence over, or are affected by a particular project, activity, or SE system. Sociocultural norms – Shared values, beliefs, customs, and informal rules that govern behaviour within a particular society or community. Socio-economic conditions – circumstances that influence an individual's or group's quality of life, opportunities, and outcomes.
Personal	Cognitive abilities – Mental skills that shape how students process opportunities, make decisions, and develop capabilities to achieve outcomes. Non-cognitive abilities – Personal traits that shape how students turn their experiences and resources into capabilities and achievements.
Environmental	Infrastructural access – Availability of infrastructure, such as labs and internet access, enables students to participate and achieve capabilities that matter to them. Influences of geographical location – Access to land for agricultural purposes, and closer to the community with needs that require entrepreneurial solutions.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

8.2.1 Social conversion factors

As presented in Table 8.1, social conversion factors are the most significant conditions affecting how students convert opportunities and resources into skills and outcomes. Goetz et al. (2023) notes that the relationality of SE, where students work in collaborative team environments to co-create social value, warrants that its success and failure are affected by social factors.

8.2.1.1 External stakeholders

In the FGDs, students identified stakeholders who contributed to their Enactus experiences. The stakeholders assumed various roles, affecting students' access to opportunities, their decision-making authority, and the development of their capabilities and functionings. Table

8.2 presents an overview of these external stakeholders to contextualise the subsequent discussion.

Table 8.2 External stakeholders influence how students convert available resources and opportunities into functionings

Stakeholder Category	Description
External	Sponsors are individuals and organisations that provide financial and business-technical support to student enterprises, whose support is based on a national and/or global development agenda.
	Business Advisory Board – Business leaders with knowledge of the corporate world volunteer to serve as advisors to students as they develop their enterprises.
	Alumni – former Enactus students who have graduated from a university.
	Enactus ZA is the South African Enactus national body coordinating Enactus South Africa teams.
	Community/Beneficiaries include collaborators, customers, and recipients of student enterprises, goods, and services.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

The external stakeholders presented in Table 8.2 influence the opportunities available to students and shape their ability to exercise agency in aligning their initiatives with the social impact they aim to achieve.

8.2.1.1.1 Sponsor priorities and development agenda

Through discussions with participants and the review of team reports, it emerged that sponsors play a huge role in providing students with financial resources and skills support. The participants also indicated that these sponsors provide financial support to enterprises that contribute to macro developmental frameworks such as the SDGs. One report reviewed shared a call from one of the Enactus sponsors, indicating the focus and how they intend to support students:

> Ford Fund, Ford College Community Challenge is a global grant competition that empowers university and college students to envision and lead change in their communities. Ford College Community Challenge advances innovative student-led projects that address a pressing local need around the theme of "building sustainable communities". Enactus teams should design and implement programmes and initiatives that address critical community needs in new ways, with a focus on helping the community become a more sustainable place to work and live (2024 Enactus South Africa Memo 07: Ford C3 Building Sustainable Communities Partnership, p. 1).

The Ford C3 challenge positions the Ford Foundation as a social conversion factor, providing students with resources such as funding and mentorship. These opportunities allow students to initiate initiatives that innovatively address critical community challenges. By providing resources and helping students apply their skills, this partnership improves their problem-solving capabilities. Through such opportunities from the sponsor, students can accomplish important leadership, innovation, and experiential learning goals.

Furthermore, the Enactus memos and impact reports revealed that Enactus SA sponsors have a global focus, supporting student initiatives that correspond with their global corporate social responsibility[28] themes. Therefore, the analysis of these documents, triangulated with interviews and the types of enterprises run by students, reveals that students align their initiatives in alignment with the funder's request, even if it is not what they love to do, what Weyrauch and Steinert (2021:90) referred to as "instrumental alignment". This suggests that, although sponsor support is a vital conversion factor, its directional impact may limit the variety of valued functionings, thus affecting student agency.

Although these functionings, such as contributing to solutions for contextual challenges through innovations discussed in Chapter 5 and generating meaningful impact, are highly valued and central to student aspirations, their realisation can be limited when students are required to align their initiatives with externally imposed funding criteria. Furthermore, Moss (2024) argued that recent global geopolitical and structural changes to national higher education budgets have further affected funding availability, especially for SE initiatives. This reality illustrates broader societal issues, in which the balance between purpose and practical realities is essential for navigating complex systems. This should be perceived not as a limitation, but as an opportunity for sponsors and institutional stakeholders to strategically support or co-design initiatives that are locally relevant and context sensitive. Aligning funding models with the diverse grassroots innovations initiated by students enhances student agency and social impact, turning funding mechanisms from restrictive gatekeepers into facilitators of transformative engagement.

8.2.1.1.2 Business Advisory Board

The Business Advisory Board (BAB) was also identified as a key stakeholder contributing to how students acquire experiential skills within the Enactus ecosystem. Participants revealed

[28] Corporate social responsibility means that a company is responsible for how it affects people and the environment. In addition to making profits, it means taking on good initiatives like helping people through donations and scholarships, protecting the environment, and treating workers fairly.

that BAB's intelligence and experience create opportunities for mentoring students, creating relational collaboration with other industry experts, and providing students with business insights. One participant articulated that:

> I view the support we receive through Enactus, particularly from the BABs, as a continuous source of guidance and opportunity. Like streams feeding into a river, their mentorship and business connections sustain our momentum and help us navigate forward with purpose, because they speak from experience in the business (FGD 3, Student 2).

The above sentiment suggests that students view BAB as supporting student initiatives with resources and guidance, providing them with industry knowledge, networks, and business insights since they share their views from practice. However, this support was not uniformly experienced, as some students regarded the role of BAB as adhoc, suggesting that they have limited capacity to enhance their skills and enterprise growth. A participant from FGD 1 noted:

> In my view, and the time I have been a member of Enactus, BAB's roles feel more distant than Faculty Advisors or direct to our work, as they are not always available when we need them; however, they should be offering mentorship and support from their business network (FGD1, student 4).

The BABs were viewed differently by the participants. From the above narrative, BAB support is not always consistently experienced or equally accessible. This suggests that when a team lacks a strong connection with its selected BAB, it may not perceive its value, especially when communication is limited or there are few shared activities between the team and the students. Although the Enactus student handbook describes BAB as a vital source of entrepreneurial support, citing their industry experience and networks as key to student entrepreneurial support, students' experiences with them vary widely. This gap between the expected role of BAB and what is delivered reveals that their impact depends on the nature of the relationship and the level of engagement with concerned students. As such, BAB cannot be seen as universally enabling or constraining; its influence depends on how actively students engage with it and how actively it engages with them in turn. Nevertheless, their recognition as key stakeholders suggests that student teams may not yet fully leverage their potential. As noted in the Enactus handbook, BAB can play a significant role in enhancing students' skills and supporting the development of sustainable enterprises that address current priorities, ultimately improving sustainability and scalability.

8.2.1.1.3 Alumni

Another stakeholder identified was alumni. When asked about alumni engagement, students acknowledged that alumni could offer leadership training and mentorship, as the BAB does, but described this support as sporadic and intermittent. For example, one participant said:

> I feel like they do not play a big part, but they do. They also train in how to become a leader. So, they equip you with smaller, general skills here and there (FGD 1 student 5).

Similar to BAB, Alumni engagement with students seems distant. A participant in FGD2 highlighted the following:

> … at the end of the day, they've graduated. Some of them are no longer in the institution. Some of them probably really do not want anything to do with Enactus anymore because of how stressful and busy it was (FGD2 student 2).

The student stated that alumni may limit their support after graduating, based on their Enactus experience and relationship with student teams. Furthermore, the student noted that some alumni may have had negative experiences in the organisation, such as responsibilities overwhelming their academic work, which could lead to their disengagement. Alumni not sharing insights and experiences that could improve student teams may hinder students' entrepreneurial skills and enterprise success, as the organisation's pivot is based on knowledge sharing and support from various structures, such as alumni. However, when a minority of alumni still contribute, providing social capital essential for organisational sustainability, the team can flourish. Alumni's ongoing engagement can provide mentorship, networks, and practical insights that any stakeholder may not offer since their experience is from being a student who may have navigated the same ecosystem as the current student. This provides greater insight, offering strategies for how they could have done better and showing whom within the institution to approach for support.

According to Malhotra et al. (2023), alumni create social capital and networks that improve student and organisational performance. Maulana et al. (2024) stressed that student-led organisations need alumni support to survive, as these individuals carry the institutional memory. Alumni participation in Enactus may reflect the nature of volunteer-driven organisations, in which personal motivation, life changes, and shifting priorities affect engagement. This may reduce students' learning opportunities, but they often show resilience and resourcefulness in maximising resources. However, formalising alumni engagement can improve student development and create more resilient, sustainable enterprise ecosystems.

8.2.1.1.4 Enactus South Africa

Students participating in the study presented Enactus South Africa, commonly referred to as Enactus ZA, as the national governing body that coordinates students and manages country SE

operations through Enactus, grounded in systems thinking[29] philosophy. Guided by the systems thinking philosophy, Enactus ZA seeks to enhance the interconnectedness of all stakeholders in mobilising, creating, and making resources such as enterprise funding from sponsors available, creating platforms for students to learn and create an impact through executing their enterprises, and enabling students to flourish and live a life with a positive impact.

One of the activities identified as the role of Enactus ZA is creating a space for student teams to present their enterprises and get feedback from industry experts. Teams that achieve the best enterprise impact, for instance, training more beneficiaries, reducing waste, and creating more jobs, are awarded as winners and have the potential to present Enactus ZA at global competitions. Exposing students to opportunities motivates them to strive for the best to get recognition, personal or team fulfilment, and a sense of purpose. Importantly, competition is a motivating factor, pushing students to refine their ideas, strengthen teamwork, and maximise impact. In this view, Costantini et al. (2025) argued that rather than being a purely external driver, the competitive element fosters a culture of excellence, innovation, and accountability. This applies to students participating in Enactus, as the competitive environment motivates them to go beyond the minimum requirements and create sustainable solutions that benefit the wider community.

Zahra and Wright (2016) indicated that organised social entrepreneurial organisations (such as Enactus) can serve as catalysts for sustainable development and community empowerment. The student mentioned that the Enactus network provides opportunities for social empowerment, enabling them to cultivate entrepreneurial skills and contribute to social impact through hands-on enterprises addressing community challenges. Thus, Enactus can be seen as a social enhancing conversion factor. This is because Enactus provides a platform for students to form teams and launch enterprises. Furthermore, Enactus provided networks and organisations with resources to support and mentor students in their enterprises. These opportunities enable students to sharpen their skills, especially in situations where conventional academic routes may not adequately prepare them for practical, real-world challenges. Nonetheless, its facilitative functioning is not consistent among all teams or individuals. The degree to which Enactus fosters opportunities for capability development depends on the accessibility of its support systems, the efficacy of team engagement with available resources, such as BAB,

[29] Systems thinking is a way of looking at the world that focuses on how things are connected rather than in isolation or in a linear view (cause and effect), seeing issues as interconnected and circular feedback loops (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2023).

alumni, or funding opportunities, and the kind of institutional support students get as they run their social enterprises.

Consequently, Enactus may face constraints when relational or structural dynamics, such as inconsistent mentorship, limited alumni engagement, or narrowly defined funding models, hinder students' capacity to innovate or fully exercise agency. Consequently, although the organisation's design and mission fundamentally empower and capacitate students with skills, resources, and opportunities for social impact, its influence as a conversion factor is determined by the interaction of systemic support, relational engagement, and student initiative.

8.2.1.1.5 Community/Beneficiaries

Communities and beneficiaries, which in this context are used interchangeably, were identified as offering more than resources. The students argued that these stakeholders present real-world contexts to test, refine and implement student enterprises. For instance, in relation to the examples of enterprises provided in Chapter 5, communities were said to be providing resources such as land for agricultural initiatives and a market for the products, which means communities play a dual role as partners and recipients, as one participant described:

> Some communities… have resources, such as land, which we use through partnerships … they also act as customers [beneficiaries] and partners, especially in agricultural projects (FGD 3 student 6).

These findings revealed diverse roles for the same stakeholders, suggesting the complexity and complementarity of stakeholders in SE ecosystems. This complexity and complementary nature determine how they improve or limit student skills and outcomes. For instance, the effectiveness of communities as stakeholders focuses on their ability to act as dynamic yet complementary conversion factors. This means that, as partners, they enhance students' collaborative capabilities and, as customers, they embrace students' entrepreneurial alertness and provide a market for the products and services they develop. The complementarity of beneficiaries provides opportunities for their participation in economic development matters, improves their well-being, and enables students to be agents of positive community change.

External stakeholders in the Enactus ecosystem act as dynamic conversion factors that either augment or limit students' capacity to transform available resources into significant skills and solutions to social problems such as poverty, pollution, and unemployment. The diverse roles of these external stakeholders provide a blend of conditions that allow students to choose, and can help improve their personal and professional development

8.2.1.2 Internal stakeholders

Internal stakeholders include students, the university, and Faculty Advisors who provide various conditions and resources that influence the development of student capabilities, such as being entrepreneurial, innovating and implementing entrepreneurial enterprises. Table 8.3 describes the stakeholders to be presented and discussed in this session.

Table 8.3 Internal stakeholders influence how students convert available resources and opportunities into functionings

Stakeholder category	Description
Internal	The university refers to the institutions that recognise the Enactus team and provide administrative support through student governing bodies and faculties.
	Faculty Advisors are university staff who voluntarily serve as links between the Enactus country office and the university, while providing mentorship to students in their social entrepreneurial enterprises.
	Registered students who form part of the Enactus team at a given university.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

Complementary to external stakeholders, internal stakeholders play a key role as social conversion variables in SE ecosystems. The internal stakeholders in Table 8.3 are discussed here, showing how they influence students' entrepreneurial journeys.

8.2.1.2.1 University support

The conversation with students revealed that university support provides complementary and dynamic conditions, including Wi-Fi connectivity and meeting venues. The report further highlighted that the university offers administrative and financial support through student governance and resources that enable students to initiate and scale social enterprises. Thus, one of the interviewed Faculty Advisors noted:

> The Enactus team would not exist without university support, as we operate within their space and rely on their recognition. Universities provide a platform for student development, including international exposure and community participation (Faculty Advisor 2).

The excerpt above confirms the university's support for students' SE initiatives. Accordingly, the university space allows students to turn their entrepreneurial ideas into community-focused businesses with funding and infrastructural support, as a participant in FGD2 noted:

> The university provides resources such as internet access, venues for our meetings, and platforms for development and growth through its programmes and community engagement. University support also includes sensitising the student body about Enactus and its opportunities (FGD 2 student 3).

This suggests that, by offering logistical support such as venues, branding, and administrative legitimacy, institutions directly influence whether resources can be mobilised and transformed into entrepreneurial projects that foster student growth. This institutional support allows students to function effectively by creating an ecosystem conducive to learning, innovation, and action, as Boni and Walker (2025) suggested that educational environments are critical for promoting agency and capability development. Institutions thus play a dual role as both formal enablers and partners in enhancing the ability to implement entrepreneurial enterprises, lead and undertake project-based learning.

When universities allow organisations such as Enactus to register on their campuses, these arrangements provide students with opportunities to apply business knowledge in real-world contexts. This further helps students sharpen their skills and proficiency by implementing enterprises like those discussed in Chapter 5. Thus, in their proposal to establish a university entrepreneurship centre where students and organisations are involved in entrepreneurial activities, Booysen and Burger (2024:2) suggested that:

> To offer permanent solutions, UFS must start the drive to transform from a 'traditional university' to an 'entrepreneurial and innovation-driven university'. This can be achieved by aligning all UFS entrepreneurial activities into a well-thought-out plan to provide entrepreneurs and innovators with the expertise, networks, and tools they need to make their ventures successful.

The excerpt above suggests that universities are keen to create conditions that promote entrepreneurial development. The university provides networks for collaboration with agencies such as EDHE[30] to support students' entrepreneurial ideas and help them contribute to positive change in their lives and society. As alluded to by the students and Faculty Advisors, the university provides platforms for students to develop entrepreneurial mindsets, offers funding opportunities for their enterprises, and enhances knowledge on entrepreneurship through organised training and mentorship. The vision of an entrepreneurial and innovation-driven university, noted by Booysen and Burger (2024), confirms the university's focus on enabling conditions for students' entrepreneurial development. This aligns with the university–government entrepreneurial support systems, such as EDHE, that support institutions in addressing skills mismatch and unemployment by creating flexible ecosystems that equip students for an ever-changing environment that requires a blend of formal

[30] EDHE is a South African government initiative, coordinated by the Department of Higher Education and Training, that promotes entrepreneurship at South African universities by fostering student startups, innovation, and employability through education, research, and ecosystem development (https://edhe.co.za/about/).

qualifications (degree qualifications) and personal and professional skills, as discussed in Chapter 7.

8.2.1.2.2 Faculty Advisors

Faculty Advisors were identified as key stakeholders affecting how students develop entrepreneurial capabilities. Students noted that Faculty Advisors offer mentorship and facilitate project-based learning by sharing insights and providing entrepreneurial advisory services. During the FGDs, a student explained:

> A Faculty Advisor bridges the gap between students and the university. They play an essential role because they have been at the university for a long time, understand the university's systems, and know how to secure support to help the team move forward (FGD 2, student 2).

This points to Faculty Advisors as stakeholders who create conditions for students to thrive within the university ecosystem, thereby enhancing opportunities and outcomes. The insights highlight that Faculty Advisors serve as a go-between for students and the university, providing a platform for students to access resources that might otherwise be difficult to obtain without their intervention.

On the same note, a Faculty Advisor noted that:

> … having been in this role for over a decade, sometimes, we are like psychologists or counsellors because we know students, and they become our friends. You end up learning their challenges, and you can see them. So, you have that parenting role when they are on campus (Faculty Advisor 1).

Like other university staff involved in student life, Faculty Advisors reported that they go beyond their professional mentorship roles to serve as informal student counsellors and parental figures. The consistent presence of Faculty Advisors as facilitators of learning and personal development represents a significant social conversion factor, enhancing students' access to university resources and support.

8.2.1.2.3 Peer support and collaboration

Students are pivotal internal stakeholders in the SE ecosystem. Students appear not only as beneficiaries but also as collaborators, peer supporters, and active users of the systems they help shape. Building on the personal conversion factors discussed in Section 8.2.2, students actively enhance their capabilities by leveraging institutional infrastructure and the support of Faculty Advisors. As co-creators of social enterprises, they influence the SE process by mobilising peers, cultivating networks, and working alongside external stakeholders such as the community and other stakeholders. The following expressions relate to the above when one of the FGD participants noted:

> Students are the ones who come up with innovative ideas and implement them as enterprises. Without students, there is no Enactus because they drive the projects … We bring energy, creativity, and new perspectives to the organisation, which is why we are essential to its success and empowerment (FGD 1 student 7).

One participant emphasised that the existence of the Enactus team depends on the students themselves; they are the ones who drive the agenda. There would be no action without students willing to step up and participate. However, a different perspective emerged in another focus group discussion. While also recognising the central role of students, this participant noted that their ability to lead initiatives is made possible by the environment shaped by others. In this view, the student pointed out that team success cannot be claimed in isolation but should also acknowledge the ongoing support and foundational work laid over the years:

> While we, as students, are at the core of Enactus, we depend on the ecosystem created by the institution and other stakeholders to succeed, including Enactus, the community, and sponsors (FGD 3, student 8).

These views illustrate that students influence their conditions, transforming resources provided by the ecosystem into valuable capabilities such as confidence, civic engagement, and a growing entrepreneurial mindset. Their proactive use of these resources suggests they are not merely beneficiaries of the system but co-designers of their development within SE ecosystems.

8.2.1.3 Socio-economic conditions

A review of the teams' impact reports revealed that South Africa's economic environment is characterised by increasing inequality, as argued by Francis and Webster (2019) and Walker (2020), pervasive food insecurity (Mirzabaev et al. 2023), and high graduate unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2025). The enterprises outlined in Chapter 5 were created to address these urgent concerns directly. Riahi et al. (2017) said that food waste accounts for up to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, contributing significantly to climate change. This corresponds with CUT 2023 impact report, which indicated that, after a community evaluation, they recognised food waste as a significant factor in global warming. In response, they structured their firm to address environmental and food security challenges. These challenging socio-economic situations have enhanced students' entrepreneurial resilience, problem-solving capabilities, skills, and social impact.

8.2.1.4 Sociocultural norms and dynamics

Participant narratives revealed that sociocultural norms, such as values and beliefs, mainly benefit, serve, and involve students in their entrepreneurial engagement, and play a crucial role in shaping students' learning and doing conditions. Social dynamics encompass the patterns of

interaction, behaviours, and changing relationships among individuals and groups that affect students' conditions for learning and co-creating solutions to identified problems.

Sociocultural norms and dynamics were inferred from participants' diverse cultural orientations and nationalities, including Nigerian, Basotho, AmaSwati, Namibian, South African, and Zimbabwean. These diverse national orientations provided various entrepreneurial ideas, a blend of strategies for engaging in enterprises, and different experiences. This mix of experiences is reported to have helped students engage with various communities, fostering conditions that propel the success of social enterprises and students' learning of different skills from diverse experiences and perspectives from other students with varying backgrounds. For instance, the ability to empathise with beneficiaries to monetise in breeding black soldier flies, a practice seen as culturally unacceptable, can be an alternative nutrient stock feed for small-scale farmers. This confirms that students are solving and adapting to complex projects, addressing urgent community needs through the entrepreneurial spirit of students with agency for positive change, even in the face of some cultural norms.

The findings further indicated that while sociocultural factors offer opportunities for learning and growth, they also pose challenges that may impede the effectiveness of student enterprises in enhancing students' skills and social impact. For instance, when students and the community are not in sync, this can hinder collaboration, trust-building, and project sustainability, acting as critical social conversion constraints. The participants highlighted that innovation and cohesion thrive when teams foster open dialogue and mutual respect, as one participant noted:

> Innovation comes from the team having discussions and arguments, but in the end agreeing on a way forward (Student interviewee 9).

The student views above are that disagreements are necessary, but there is no progress without common ground. Thus, at the community level, without cultural sensitivity, even well-intentioned social entrepreneurial efforts risk misalignment, as another participant reflected:

> We wanted to develop a biogas[31] An enterprise that addressed the energy challenges of small-scale farmers around our campus; however, they never understood the concept, and we had to let it go (Alumni interviewee 16).

Globally, biogas has been seen as a clean energy substitute for thermal electricity. However, its production process, especially when using sewage sludge, has been overly contested because it is seen as not aligning with the communities' cultural beliefs. Thus, Ang and Van Dyne (2015) and Canestrino et al. (2020) argued that strategic attention to cultural understanding and

[31] Biogas- a form of clean energy that combats organic waste such as human faecal waste, animal manure, through a process of digestion in the absence of oxygen to produce gas that can be used for domestic and industrial use.

inclusive engagement (co-creation) is essential when implementing. This helps to enhance team dynamics and ensure that social enterprises are contextually grounded and culturally relevant. When these are aligned, the enterprises are capable of unlocking meaningful development outcomes, in this context, for both students and the community involved.

8.2.2 Personal conversion factors

This section presents personal conversion factors drawing from Robeyns (2017), which are described as the internal characteristics of a person, such as their intelligence or physical ability, that influence how they transform resources into outcomes. These will be categorised into cognitive and non-cognitive skills and discussed in the following subsections.

8.2.2.1 Cognitive abilities

Regarding personal conversion factors, cognitive abilities emerged as a key dimension from participants' responses and interactions. Peng and Kievit (2020) expressed cognitive abilities as individual conversion factors encompassing mental processes, including reasoning, critical thinking, and creativity. These personal factors are described in Table 8.4, followed by a pathway that helps transform resources and opportunities into functionings that enhance individual agency and life choices. Although presented independently, these factors are interconnected. Thus, each build and contributes to the other, making them a blend of factors that enhance or constrain the outcomes and student learning experiences. The boundaries between cognitive abilities are blurred in many ways; however, they are separated here for the analysis.

Table 8.4 Cognitive abilities as personal conversion factors influencing student functionings and capabilities

Cognitive ability	Description
Critical thinking	The ability to objectively analyse and evaluate issues to form reasoned judgements.
Problem-solving	The capacity to identify challenges and develop effective, innovative solutions.
Strategic thinking	The skill to anticipate future trends, set goals, and align actions with long-term plans.
Creativity	The process of choosing the best course of action among available alternatives.

Decision-making	Using imagination and novel thinking to generate original ideas or approaches.

Source: Author's construct (2025)

The cognitive factors presented in Table 8.4 emerged as crucial in empowering students to transform the opportunities offered by the Enactus ecosystem into skills and valued outcomes, such as problem-solving and pioneering sustainable impact solutions. Students noted that their involvement in Enactus compelled them to go beyond academic theory and apply analytical reasoning to real-world scenarios. For example, one male student mentioned:

> Initially, our vermiculture enterprise was challenging because it was a new concept to us. We had to teach ourselves to understand the worms' environmental needs. We learned from the challenges we faced and adapted our methods until we were successful (Student Interviewee 2).

The student said they had to learn how to breed the wriggler worms from the start. This expression suggests that critical thinking was applied to solve identified problems creatively. Problem-solving emerged as a crucial cognitive skill, particularly in how students introduced a new creative approach to addressing identified problems. The students explained that these problems were identified through a needs assessment, which helped them prioritise solutions. During the process, the students highlighted the need to collaborate with other stakeholders to deliver sustainable solutions, as one student noted:

> We identified relevant stakeholders for the necessary expertise. Banks like FNB provided short courses to help people understand finances. At the agricultural enterprise, which we soon left for the community, Patriot Vision for Africa [PAVA], an agrarian company from Lesotho, guided farming, helped set up the enterprise structure, and assisted with crop maintenance (Alumni interviewee 8).

From the above perspective, the students acknowledged the need for collaborative efforts to deliver sustainable solutions. Through these arrangements, they also tapped into skills and experience, such as those of bankers and agriculturists.

Regarding strategic thinking and decision-making, the students revealed how they managed each other to comply with set standards for enterprise progress. These cognitive abilities enhance effective enterprise leadership, community impact, and professional development. They further showed students' increased freedom to choose and act in ways they considered valuable to succeed, as they reflected on how these were practised during the presentations at the national competition:

> We were preparing for the nationals and having rules for the boot camp ... If you are late, you pay a certain amount. So that's how we've been coming up with some solutions (Alumni interviewee 7).

Furthermore, to show how these cognitive abilities manifested in their entrepreneurial practice, the students presented various scenarios that highlighted the application of these skills, as highlighted in Table 8.4. Through engagement with participants, creativity also emerged as a

crucial ability among students. In this context, creativity facilitates individuals in generating new ideas and innovating in problem-solving (Altinay et al. 2022). In this context, the students expressed the following:

> We are trying to move away from coal-fired power generation. Our goal is to use hydrogen derived from water molecules ... We have separated hydrogen from water, and our next phase is to demonstrate that it works effectively (Student interviewee 14).

The student's expression suggested creative innovation towards addressing air pollution resulting from thermal power production. The student's words, "We are trying to move away from using coal to produce electricity", suggest an understanding of the environmental hazards caused by using coal. Therefore, this understanding of environmental issues prompted them to design prototypes of hydrogen energy solutions, thereby advocating for sustainable solutions. The student's expression further suggests how the Enactus ecosystem challenges students to act on topical issues through innovation and creativity. It also shows how students seek to learn and develop new solutions, using the knowledge they acquire at the university to address real-world challenges in meaningful ways.

8.2.2.2 Non-cognitive abilities

Peng and Kievit (2020) defined non-cognitive abilities as personal traits influencing human behaviour, emotions, and goal-directed actions. Non-cognitive abilities influence motivation, determination, and the kinds of capabilities a person ought to develop, thereby further influencing valued outcomes. The non-cognitive abilities presented in Table 8.4 were identified using inductive analysis. These include open-mindedness, resilience, goal orientation, self-confidence and curiosity. Data patterns revealed that these non-cognitive abilities develop as students engage with other stakeholders, enhancing their experiential learning. Like cognitive abilities, the boundaries are blurred but are teased out here for the analysis.

Table 8.5 presents five key non-cognitive personal conversion factors, which are further discussed in the following section to illustrate their influence on students' capabilities and functionings.

Table 8.5 Non-cognitive abilities as personal conversion factors influencing student functionings and capabilities

Non-cognitive ability	Description
Open-mindedness	Willingness to consider diverse perspectives and challenge one's assumptions during analysis.
Resilience	The ability to persevere in working on solutions despite failures, setbacks, or uncertainty.
Goal orientation	The mindset and behaviour that one develops towards achieving the set long-term objectives with purpose and focus.
Self-confidence	Trust in one's judgement as a result of being self-aware, self-efficacy and a positive mindset in trusting their decisions
Curiosity	The desire to explore the unknown through an open mind, questioning cognitive engagement and empathetic interest. It is the willingness to take chances on uncertain, innovative, untested ideas.

Evidence from participant interviews and student FGDs indicates that non-cognitive skills are crucial for students as they engage in Enactus. For instance, students' narratives revealed open-mindedness, an important non-cognitive ability, as they sought to connect, learn, unlearn, and relearn from various stakeholder perspectives and adapt to diverse community environments. One student stated:

> I took insight and validated Sis Lulu's[32] learn, unlearn and relearn model. Also, from that engagement, I learned that it is essential to keep learning, revisiting your first opinion on everything and anything (Student interviewee 13).

The above expression shows intellectual humility, a fundamental characteristic of open-mindedness, and readiness to adjust one's beliefs and assumptions. It serves as an individual conversion factor that promotes lifelong learning and adaptability. Similarly, another respondent noted:

> Before looking for an external issue, realise that you, as an individual, may be adding to the problem, so if I am the problem, I should work on myself before I try to work on the outside (Student Interviewee 10).

The student's narrative reveals that self-awareness and critical self-reflection are essential characteristics of open-mindedness. It further shows that open-mindedness is crucial for personal and professional development dimensions discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, facilitating reflection, acknowledging diverse ideas, and continuous relearning. This, in turn, improves

[32] Sis Lulu (pseudonym) was a keynote speaker during the 2023 Enactus National Exposition.

students' abilities in innovation, resilience, adaptability, and leadership, which are essential for transformative human development. To add, another student expressed the following:

> The first is resilience … because running a social enterprise is difficult. It's not easy and takes much endurance … much sacrifice, commitment …, and especially balancing that with academics (Student interviewee 13).

Another participant expressed the key abilities needed to succeed in the SE ecosystems:

> We didn't get very far at Nationals … But it was motivating to see how other teams have gone … You lose in the first round and come back like, I know we need to do the best next year (Student interviewee 9).

The above excerpts suggest that students' resilience, embodied in perseverance, adaptability, and commitment to balancing entrepreneurial pressures and academic work, is a crucial non-cognitive personal conversion factor that enables students to aspire for better outcomes. The expression above may suggest that these processes allow individuals to use these challenges as opportunities to develop self-confidence. This appears essential in the ever-changing world, where new ideas may be obsolete tomorrow; therefore, students need to adapt and be willing to keep adapting to changes.

Furthermore, the student narratives revealed that being goal-oriented was another key non-cognitive condition that facilitated the conversion of the desire to do better into actionable plans. The narratives show that it helps students if they have a clear vision of where they want to go, for instance, to win the national competition with an impactful enterprise. Clarifying this vision enhances focus and strategic planning, enabling students to address challenges and align their efforts with meaningful developmental objectives that guide winning teams. The following captures how one student envisioned their strategy for success:

> I am going to plan better to avoid failure, ensure the team is aware of the impact and results needed to meet the competition's requirements, and prepare on time for the presentations (Student interviewee 15).

The above participant emphasised the importance of being goal-oriented; thus, they must follow the procedures planned and agreed upon by the team to achieve the goals. Similarly, another student expressed their vision to do things differently to improve their outcomes and impact:

> Creating a calendar with plans the team needs to follow would make things better to do according to the calendar to get results (Student interviewee 16).

The above excerpts suggest that the students realised that not becoming the most impactful team was due to improper planning. Therefore, during the interview, they realised that the team's failure to reach the national competition enabled them to plan effectively, set goals, organise activities, and dedicate themselves to achieving enterprise success. The success of the

enterprise would mean gaining pertinent skills through a process which requires cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, as discussed here.

Another non-cognitive skill identified was self-confidence, which enabled students to communicate, take initiative, and seize opportunities. Students indicated that their involvement in Enactus facilitated their ability to act decisively and to present themselves in public. The following example shows how the student expressed self-confidence:

> During the national competitions, I found the courage to approach other students from other universities and other company executives who were present and have conversations with them. I appreciate that opportunity ... I know this is the ability I'll need when I finish my studies (Student interviewee 16).

The self-drive shown above shows that the student was able to make the most of the condition to build networks they value for their future careers. On the same note, another student noted how being part of the team had broadened their ability to conduct themselves professionally, which was identified in Chapter 6 as the key theme of the role of SE to student development:

> Enactus significantly boosted my confidence and taught me to conduct myself professionally in various settings, especially during our trip to the World Cup. It has instilled confidence and improved my networking and business manoeuvring skills, which I feel I would not have got if I were not a part of a network with such spaces (Student interviewee 11).

The data illustrate how self-confidence manifests in networking, leadership, and professional communication capabilities. The students showed that exposure to the Enactus network, particularly the opportunity to attend the national and World Cup expositions, was beneficial. These events were key highlights for many participants as they created a space for learning, reflection, building self-confidence, and networking with other stakeholders. These expressions of developing self-confidence suggest the ability to build relationships that support both leading and collaborative outcomes. How students challenged their limitations illustrates how self-confidence enhances academic resilience and the ability to innovate and contribute to solving social problems; these non-cognitive abilities enhance student capabilities and functioning for sustainable human development.

In this discussion, the last non-cognitive ability identified was curiosity. The students expressed it as a personal condition that drives a student's active engagement in seeking knowledge, fostering creative exploration, and encouraging questioning traditional methodologies to develop innovative alternatives to solving the problems communities face. It shows in the conception of enterprises and through ongoing learning and inquiry during project execution and team collaboration:

> We were trying to implement new ideas … There were a couple of ideas that we came up with … we found out about making aeroponic systems and hydroponic systems, we tried, but it did not work … Then

> … the idea of the black soldier flies came. Our goal was to find the finest solution to the problems we had identified (Student interviewee 11).

The above expressions suggest that curiosity has driven Enactus students to be entrepreneurial and innovative, as presented in Chapter 7. These innovations led to the implementation of sustainable solutions in the form of enterprises presented in Chapter 5, contributing to social impact and to valued skills such as those mentioned above, stemming from the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities discussed here. The personal factors discussed here are relational, as they emerged through social interaction and collaboration, shaping and being shaped by students' engagement within teams, communities, and institutional contexts.

The personal conversion factors presented herein influence how students transform opportunities into realised functionings and capabilities. Pusz et al. (2024) argued on the importance of connecting relationships in SE initiatives for sustainability. From this perspective, such internal capacities function interdependently, engaging dynamically with social and institutional contexts and facilitating or hindering human development outcomes. The discussed cognitive abilities enable students to make informed decisions, whereas noncognitive traits foster perseverance and adaptability in the ever-changing world.

8.2.3 Environmental conversion factors

The third dimension of conversion factors influencing students' capabilities and functionings is the environmental dimension, which, like personal and social factors, interacts dynamically with and shapes the others. Environmental conversion factors are external conditions and settings that include natural and physical factors that influence a person's ability to convert available resources into valued capabilities and outcomes (Robeyns, 2017; Seckler and Volkert, 2021). The following subsection delves into the infrastructural and geographic factors that emerged as essential conditions affecting the formation and development of what students' value in terms of skills and social impact.

8.2.3.1 Infrastructural access factors

Access to infrastructural resources emerged as key to affecting students' valued functionings and capabilities. Drawing from Robyn's (2017) categorisation of conversion factors and alignment with this context: infrastructural factors refer to the physical conditions that affect an individual's capacity to transform available resources into capabilities and functionings. The findings revealed that access to land for agricultural purposes, infrastructure, workspaces, and stakeholder collaboration enable conditions for students to initiate agricultural enterprises to enhance food security, where they develop skills and create impact. For instance, one student noted:

> Initially, the enterprise operated only in the garage at somebody's house… Meals on Wheels offered a piece of land. So now they've expanded to operate on a much larger space than working in the garage (Student interviewee 6).

These physical resources are not only supportive; they actively affect the feasibility, scalability, and sustainability of student-led initiatives, rendering them crucial in transforming available inputs into capabilities and valued outcomes. Similarly, another participant highlighted how access to infrastructure is key in developing their enterprises:

> I now understand that success comes from collaboration. In our Energy and Tech enterprise, we have collaborated with the Motheo Incubation Centre. They provide a workshop where we use computers and 3D printers to make our prototypes and products (Student interviewee 4).

What also emerged is the relational dimension, in which students highlight an intervention by a particular stakeholder to obtain a specific resource. Data records indicate that students involved in thinking, imagining, or conceptualising new ideas or solutions, such as energy and technological enterprise ideas, expressed above, benefited from access to an incubation centre equipped with 3D printers and workshop space provided by their partner stakeholders. This relationship enhances student prototype development, which, if they had relied only on their university's resources, they would not have been able to expand their ideas or learn more in the process.

While the university lacked some resources for developing students' entrepreneurial ideas, the students acknowledged institutional support, particularly transport for cross-campus collaboration and for engaging beneficiaries. Importantly, external stakeholders, such as those identified in this section, supported student initiatives by providing land and infrastructure, highlighting how relationships can amplify or limit the development of capability. These interactions underscore that student agency is embedded within a web of relational dynamics, in which personal effort is enabled or constrained by social and environmental factors that shape access to opportunities and the development of skills for sustainable human development.

8.2.3.2 Influences of geographical location

Traditionally, the geographical location of an entrepreneur has been seen as determining market reach and business growth (Rasvanis and Tselios, 2023). Entrepreneurs in remote areas often have been constrained from accessing various services in cities and towns. However, a review of Enactus reports provides a different perspective: over the years, rural universities, predominantly in rural parts of South Africa, such as those in the KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo

provinces, have been involved.[33] This has been delivering a sustainable impact compared to those in metropolitan areas, such as in the Gauteng and Western Cape provinces (Enactus, 2025). On the other hand, universities in urban areas may outpace rural teams due to access to technological resources and the ability to secure funding from companies' corporate social responsibility initiatives. For instance, for over a decade, one of the teams has reported receiving support from external stakeholders involved in mining operations near its campus.

Like social and personal factors, environmental conversion factors also affect how students convert the resources at their disposal and the opportunities they have into valuable outcomes. These findings revealed that some university locations may present limitations, such as distance from urban resources, and arguably have abundant or limited institutional facilities. These geographical contexts, however, also promote innovation and community-driven solutions. As explained above, students further highlighted that partnering with local institutions provided essential resources such as land and infrastructure that enabled student enterprises to thrive. Such support reflects how place-based assets can be mobilised to expand students' fundamental freedoms to act and achieve. Given the above, Fongwa (2023:92) argued that "for a more active, hands-on, and outcome-oriented approach to university-community engagement for South African universities", which relates to these stakeholders, with whom students could interact because of their existing relationship with the institutions.

Similarly, environmental factors do not operate in isolation but interact with personal and social dimensions, shaping the scope of what students can be and do. Hence, the environmental factors discussed here embed stakeholders and relational attributes that students create to acquire resources such as land and state-of-the-art infrastructure relevant to their enterprise development. Therefore, even in resource-constrained settings, students can convert local opportunities into meaningful outcomes, affirming that geographical location, when navigated strategically, can serve as a source of capability enhancement rather than constraint.

8.3 Discussion

This section discusses the impact of social, personal, and environmental conversion factors on students' skills through SE using Enactus lenses. The framing of these conversion factors is based on the CA (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1989), explaining how institutional and stakeholder support (social), individual attributes and skills (personal), and physical context (environmental), such as infrastructure and location, can either facilitate or constrain students'

[33] As categorised by the Municipal Demarcation Board (https://www.demarcation.org.za/) and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (https://www.dalrrd.gov.za/).

capabilities and functionings. The section discusses the interplay of these factors in influencing students' agency and development in higher education.

Sen (1989) argued that individuals vary in their access to resources and their capacity to transform these resources into valued outcomes and states of being. The findings show that social conversion factors, especially support from stakeholders such as universities, sponsors, mentors, Faculty Advisors, and peers, are crucial to developing students' capabilities to navigate their entrepreneurial journeys. These findings suggest that students with strong social support could spearhead sustainable projects, establish partnerships, and represent their institutions in national and international entrepreneurial competitions. In contrast, insufficient university recognition and bureaucratic obstacles constrained students' ability to expand their initiatives, affecting the development of their valued experiential skills.

The other vital aspects that emerged as crucial in influencing the conversion of resources into student capabilities are social norms, values, and the community's expectations. In environments characterised by inclusivity, open communication, and trust, students reported increased confidence and a community's willingness to partner and create a sustainable impact, benefiting the community and student learning as implementers and collaborators. Conversely, unsupportive environments hinder the conversion of these resources into the desired outcome. This was expressed in students' challenges when co-creating ideas, such as using social media for education or breeding soldier flies as stock feed. These findings underscore Nussbaum's (2011) assertions that affiliation and environmental control are essential to achieving social impact and student skills development.

It further emerged that stakeholders, such as sponsors, prioritised enterprises that were anchored in national development agendas, such as the National Planning Commission (2012) and SDGs, which determine the focus and direction of student entrepreneurial agency. For instance, if a sponsor provides funding for Climate Action (SDG 13)- related enterprises, students must propose an idea aligned with the call to access this financial support. Therefore, while these stakeholders play a crucial role in supporting students, misalignment can sometimes restrict student agency, especially when innovation is required to meet established funding parameters. This illustrates how embedded structural power relations within social contexts can influence the path and viability of student-led initiatives and the outcomes they value.

Turning to personal conversion factors, cognitive factors such as critical thinking, creativity, and decision-making were identified as valued outcomes of participation in SE through Enactus. These abilities empowered students to formulate social enterprises, respond creatively to community demands, and expand their entrepreneurial skills. It is important to note that

cognitive abilities were not merely a result of academic learning but also arose from experiential involvement with real-world issues. This reinforces the importance of blending theory with experiential learning, as advocated for by Kolb (2015). Kolb argued for integrating experiential learning into formal and practical contexts to develop sustainable human skills.

The findings further pointed out that non-cognitive attributes such as resilience, open-mindedness, confidence, and motivation were equally essential. Various students observed that, through Enactus initiatives, they effectively honed their project management, community engagement, and competitive presentations, requiring technical proficiency, adaptability, and persistent effort. These findings correspond with the human development perspective, which underscores enhancing individuals' freedoms to pursue a life that students consider valuable (Sen, 1985). Adding to this is the understanding that the mentioned skills and attributes go beyond economic or academic avenues, but also through psychological and emotional empowerment. These personal factors are crucial for creating an environment where cognitive and non-cognitive skills develop and contribute to entrepreneurial agency.

It is important to highlight that personal conversion factors varied among participants. Although Enactus offers ideal conditions for student development, students' benefits from the ecosystem are also influenced by their cognitive and non-cognitive abilities. DeJaeghere (2018) supported this understanding, highlighting cognitive and non-cognitive skills, along with entrepreneurial agency, to stress the connection between opportunity and personal readiness, showing that the impact of students acquiring skills and championing depends on the opportunities they have (capabilities) and on how ready they are to use them.

Regarding environmental conversion factors, infrastructure and geographical location emerged as essential influences on students' opportunities and choices. Students with access to campus infrastructure, such as incubators or access to land, were able to prototype their entrepreneurial ideas, leading to the successful implementation of these enterprises. The lack of such infrastructure constrained students' ability to do and be what they valued through SE initiatives.

Although Rasvanis and Tselios (2023) and Sternberg (2022) argued that geographical location is a factor influencing entrepreneurial practice, this study's findings reveal a different trend, particularly when the focus is on making a profit with a purpose-driven impact, creating sustainable and empowering communities. Over the years, the Enactus reports reviewed suggest that students from rural universities, despite inadequate infrastructure, have achieved a sustainable social and economic impact in SE domains. These findings indicate that entrepreneurial agency plays a significant role in what an individual can achieve, outweighing the influence of geographical location.

The relationship between the conversion factors discussed above and their effect on entrepreneurial agency is shown in Figure 8.1. The figure also indicates that entrepreneurial agency facilitates the relationship between the capabilities and results they value, such as being digitally proficient.

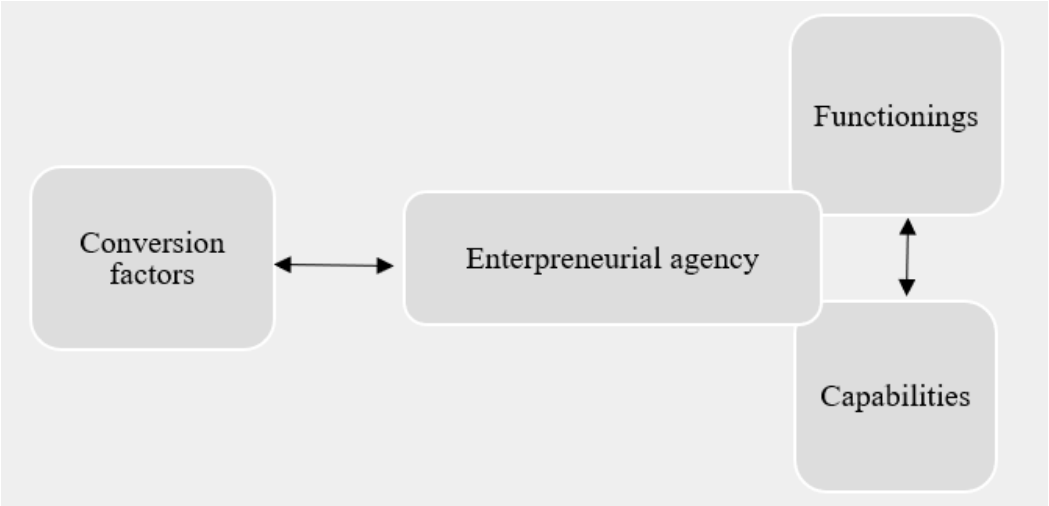


Figure 8.1 Conversion factors influencing capabilities and functionings through entrepreneurial agency

Source: Author's own (2025)

DeJaeghere (2018) echoed this relationship, emphasising the importance of nurturing personal abilities, such as cognitive abilities and non-cognitive abilities. Also, it stresses that entrepreneurial agency is key to driving personal development and impact. Entrepreneurial agency is not an isolated characteristic; it is promoted through experiential learning, relationships, reflection, and opportunity. Additionally, conversion factors provide students with opportunities to exercise entrepreneurial agency. As Sternberg (2022) argued that entrepreneurship operates in a complex relationship with stakeholders, affecting its success with a strong emphasis on conversion factors.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the conversion factors that affect how students learn, use their skills, and create impact through SE, through the Enactus lens. Conversion factors were categorised into social, personal and environmental factors. Social factors, such as stakeholders grouped into external and internal categories, were discussed in terms of their effects on opportunities and valued outcomes. Personal conversion factors were categorised into cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, which determine an individual's readiness to learn and to create an impact. Furthermore, environmental factors were examined, with a focus on infrastructure and geographical influences. Students' entrepreneurial agency acted as a collective and relational

choice to learn and create a sustainable impact through implementing entrepreneurial enterprises, leading, collaborating, creating social impact and championing sustainability initiatives. The findings showed that students work collaboratively; their ability to be entrepreneurial and to develop skills and effects from these engagements depends significantly on their environment and the people who help them. The findings also showed that having resources is not enough; students need supportive environments and help from various stakeholders to turn these resources into skills and outcomes of impact. Lastly, understanding these conversion factors helps us understand how HEIs can create conducive environments that encourage personal growth and innovation and broadly promote human development.

The reflexive interrogation of student narratives highlights that capability conversion through Enactus is contingent upon levels of participation, access to resources, institutional support, and programme design. Leadership roles, engagement continuity, and the competitive architecture of Enactus play a significant role in shaping both experiences and how students interpret and articulate impact. Recognising these conditions moves the analysis beyond descriptive affirmation and avoids treating participant accounts as singular truths.

This chapter provided the last section of the presentation and discussion of the findings. To recap the empirical chapters, Chapter 5 presented four Enactus enterprises to contextualise the projects that students initiate in Enactus. Chapter 6 presented students' perspectives on the role of Enactus in human development. The three themes presented and discussed were social, professional, and personal development. Chapter 7 presented five capabilities developed through students' engagement in the Enactus initiative, which led to a discussion of student entrepreneurial agency. Entrepreneurial agency, therefore, emerged as a mediating factor in the conversion factors presented in this chapter.

The following chapter connects the literature, conceptual, and methodology chapters with the empirical chapters to theorise how SE, using Enactus lenses, enhances capabilities for human development within South African HEIs. This integration enables the novel proposal of a Social Entrepreneurial Capability Framework, which, in its development, can effectively enhance capabilities and promote sustainable human development when embedded within a responsive higher education ecosystem and driven by student agency.

Chapter 9
Theorising Social Entrepreneurship for Human Development: Synthesis, Implications, and Conclusions

9.1 From empirical insight to theoretical contribution

This chapter brings the thesis to its conceptual and reflective culmination, presenting three major components. First, the chapter introduces the Social Entrepreneurship Capability Framework (SECF), which was developed from the study's findings. The SECF offers a theoretically grounded, practice-informed model to guide higher HEIs in harnessing SE for human development. This framework synthesises the key insights, theoretical contributions, and practical implications of the research. It concludes the study with a forward-looking reflection on its significance, limitations, and possibilities for future inquiry.

The following section presents the development of SECF, which offers a conceptual model that brings together key findings, theory, and practice to guide institutions in unlocking the full potential of student-led innovation to contribute to the broader development mandate.

9.2 Social Entrepreneurship Capability Framework

The SECF is a heuristic framework for capability-driven higher education that prioritises experiential learning, dynamic graduate outcomes such as entrepreneurial thinking, and equips graduates not only with employability skills but also with the capacity to innovate and drive societal change.

9.2.1 Conceptualising the Social Entrepreneurship Capability Framework: Purpose and design

In response to the empirical findings and theoretical insights presented in Chapters 5 to 8, this chapter introduces the SECF to explain how SE in higher education can potentially enhance student capabilities, foster human development, and transform institutions into agents of change. The SECF is a conceptual framework that explains how SE can serve as both an aspirational intervention and a capability-enhancing process within HEIs.

9.2.2 Recognising and embedding social entrepreneurship in higher education

The SECF places the institutions at the centre while acknowledging students as the underlying force with the potential to contribute to the university's broader sustainable development mandates. In the process, students expand their skills and capabilities. Figure 9.1 provides a

schematic presentation of the model. While the framework is presented in linear form, it will work in more complicated ways in practice. The framework thus serves as a heuristic device for dialogue and development. It should also not be seen as a fixed blueprint but rather as a dynamic, evolving consideration of all factors affecting higher education and SE ecosystems.

The SECF developed in this study is both a theoretical model and a call to action. It responds to a critical disconnection in South African higher education: the persistent mismatch between the skills universities produce and the capabilities students and society need. It addresses a deeper question: Why, despite having the potential, do many students struggle to realise their agency and contribute meaningfully to sustainable human development?

Freire (2020) argued that students in higher education are too often regarded as passive beneficiaries of knowledge, empty vessels to be filled, or, at best, as recipients of institutional interventions. In the same vein, Kalsoom et al. (2020) highlighted that the prevailing curriculum tends to exclude students from actively participating in the learning process. This critique resonates with the insights of UFS Thought-Leader Panel,[34] which called for bold transformation in curriculum, employability, and access. The panel emphasised the importance of integrating African identities and lived experiences into teaching and learning, framing higher education as a co-created process. Additionally, the panellists underscored work-integrated learning as a critical pathway for bridging education and employability.

The panellists of UFS Thought Leader further stressed the importance of work-integrated learning as a critical bridge between academic knowledge and practical relevance. Their argument was that education must move beyond theory to prepare students for real-life challenges in local economies. They advocate for mainstreaming experiential learning to address the employability gap and promote inclusive, socially responsive graduate outcomes. These conversations offered hope that, when esteemed individuals recognise the value of experiential learning, these kinds of studies contribute to the broader, real issues facing higher education.

The traditional education approach perceives students who enter university as not coming as blank slates. They come with histories, experiences, knowledge, and untapped capabilities. They bring resilience forged in communities, informal leadership shaped in youth movements,

[34] A Thought Leader Panel Discussion was held on 23 July 2025 at the University of the Free State. The panel consisted of Dr Phethiwe Matutu (Chief executive officer, Universities South Africa), Max Price (former Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town), Prof. Hester C. Klopper (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of the Free State), Prof. Pamela Dube (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Central University of Technology) and Prof. Paul Green (Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Sol Plaatje University). Report available at: https://www.ufs.ac.za/templates/news-archive-item/campus-news/2025/july/ufs-thought-leader-panel-calls-for-bold-transformation-in-curriculum-employability-and-access (Accessed 23 July 2025).

entrepreneurial instincts developed in family hustles, and a desire to shape their futures. Therefore, the university should be one of the platforms where these opportunities are enhanced and nurtured to their full potential. Building from the UFS Panel discussion, Kalsoom et al. (2020) and Freire (2020), acknowledging the transformation of systems that fail to recognise or activate student voices, the SECF (see 9.1) is an attempt to restore voice, to show that when students are given meaningful spaces, they do not just succeed, they transform.

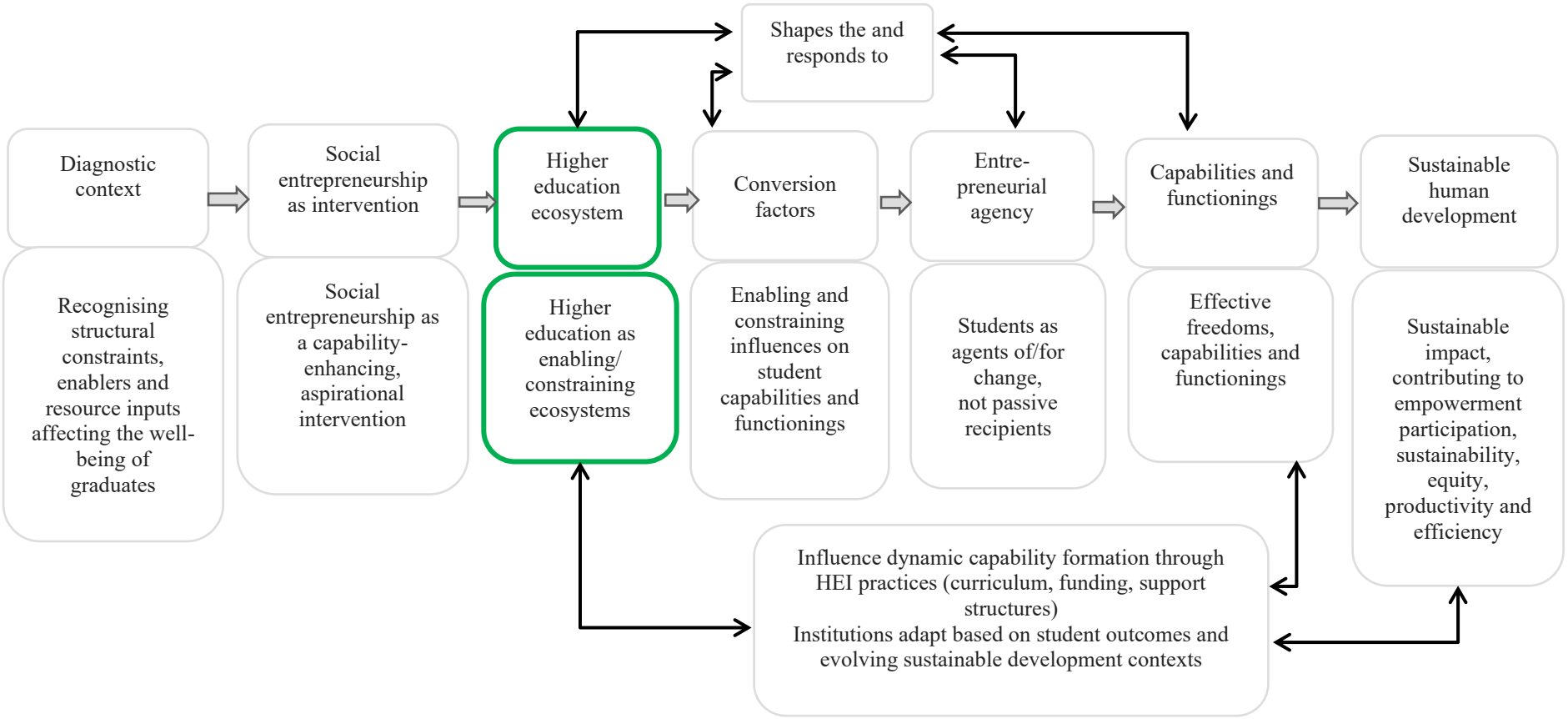


Figure 9.1 Social entrepreneurial capability framework for enhancing student development in higher education

Source: Author's own (2025)

9.2.3 Diagnostic context in higher education: Situating social entrepreneurship as a capability enabling approach

This section explains the first three elements of the framework from left to right. The SECF begins with the diagnostic context, which first identifies structural, pedagogical, and institutional factors that constrain students' capabilities rather than simply blaming unemployable graduates. Once these are mapped out, possible interventions are developed to help students surpass this, gain meaningful skills, and contribute to their well-being and sustainable development. This model identifies SE as a capability-enhancing, aspirational intervention among the possible interventions. This means three things:

First, as a capability-enhancing mechanism, SE can be seen as expanding students' freedoms and opportunities, enabling them to do and be what they value. This is the core underpinnings of CA (Sen, 1989), which was also reflected in the findings presented between Chapters 5 and 8. In these empirical chapters, the students showed that engaging in SE through Enactus empowered them, gave them the skills to lead, start businesses, and create social impact, enabling them to do what they value.

Secondly, SE, as an aspiration, should be seen as encouraging vision, hope, and ambition. In this instance, the findings revealed that students started enterprises to address food insecurity and create employment. Through these achievements, students imagine better futures for themselves and their communities.

Thirdly, SE is seen as an intervention that involves a strategic, intentional educational process. It is an intervention because it provides opportunities for skills development, augmenting what the UFS leadership panel presented as referred to above. It should be seen as an intentional educational process in which experiential learning is not a privilege but an opportunity to advance students' contributions to meaning in their homes and societies. Thus, HEIs should be seen and act as an enabling SE ecosystem to achieve these.

Based on the findings presented in the empirical chapters, where SE was identified as a potential approach contributing to enhancing students' capabilities and functionings for social impact, SECF serves as a point of recognising HEIs as ecosystems and augmenting academic credentials. Walker and Boni (2020) considered HEI transformative institutions that expand human capabilities through participatory, justice-oriented curricula. In this light, SECF, as a heuristic model based on SE, can offer a way forward in achieving these expectations. Similarly, DeJaeghere (2021) provided empirical foundations for applying the relational capabilities theory in HEIs, showing how entrepreneurship can contribute to the development of agency, aspirations, and social justice among graduates. Therefore, the SECF, grounded in

student voices, provides a potential starting point towards realising these goals. The third key contribution of SECF is to argue that equipping students with sustainable capabilities and competences requires transformative educational frameworks rather than traditional competence models. This view was expressed by Holdsworth and Thomas (2021), who noted the need for transformation in higher education to address inequalities and qualification mismatches.

9.2.4 Conversion factors: Mediating terrain for achieving functionings and capabilities

The first two parts of the SECF unpack the conditions and motivations of embedding SE within enabling higher education ecosystems to foster student capabilities, agency, and sustainable human development. The three interlinked components are conversion factors, entrepreneurial agency, and capabilities and functionings. These components explain how students transform SE opportunities into meaningful development outcomes.

Conversion factors were presented in Chapter 8, showing how they affect the ability of students to convert the available and accessible resources and opportunities presented in Chapter 7 into outcomes they value (Robeyns, 2017). In the SECF, these factors are critical in shaping whether and how students can engage meaningfully with SE opportunities. They are the pivot to the whole process, influencing these factors through their policies, pedagogical approaches, institutional culture, and support systems. Walker and Boni (2020) argued that inclusive curricula promote social justice and well-being. In this view, when students have access to funding mechanisms, mentorship structures, and their work is recognised as part of their learning outcomes, they can do and be what they value. This could encourage more students to engage in social entrepreneurship to gain more skills, while others open more social enterprises to create jobs and contribute to social impact. However, bureaucratic rigidity, academic elitism, or a lack of support are negative conversion factors that limit student engagement and agency. This leads to ongoing challenges with mismatches between graduates' skills and industry expectations, hindering their meaningful contributions to society.

Chapter 7 presented entrepreneurial agency, which captures students' capacity to act intentionally and creatively in driving social change. Traditional forms of education see students as passive recipients of knowledge; the SECF redefines this view, positioning students as co-creators of value who, through SE, promote individual and collective agency. This understanding broadens Walker's (2010) emphasis on practical reason and agency as central capabilities that enable individuals to shape their lives and contribute to society. In the context of SECF, agency is not merely about business creation; it includes students' ability to identify community needs, innovate solutions, mobilise stakeholders, and reflect critically on their

development trajectories. The exercise of agency is made possible and often enhanced by supportive conversion factors. In turn, the agency contributes to developing valued capabilities; thus, the HEIs go beyond credentialing students, but create ecosystems where students thrive and become the best of themselves.

In Chapter 7, students' narratives highlighted the forms of entrepreneurial capabilities and functionings they value in achieving. Within the SECF, capabilities identified in this study were presented in Chapter 7, enabling students to lead, innovate, and think critically. These are linked to human development and echoed in the SDG agenda (United Nations, 2015). Functionings are realised in students' demonstrated achievements. Thus, SECF emphasises that these capabilities and functionings emerge not only from individual efforts but also from the interaction among institutional environments, conversion conditions, and entrepreneurial action. As such, HEIs play a strategic role in expanding students' learning and enhancing their fundamental freedoms and life chances, which, in this case, SECF is provided as a launch pad for achieving these idealised outcomes and student freedoms. This reframing of student outcomes goes beyond traditional academic performance, recognising development as an intrinsically valuable goal that cannot only be measured by credentials.

Conversion factors, entrepreneurial agency, capabilities and functionings collectively constitute the dynamic engine of the SECF. They are not linear but co-constitutive: conversion factors shape agency; agency activates capability development; and functionings, once realised, feed back into institutional learning and the evolution of SE ecosystems. These relationships confirm that, while SECF is presented in a linear format, it is a dynamic framework in practice. In this way, the SECF promotes a vision of higher education where SE becomes both a means to and an expression of human development.

9.2.5 Sustainable human development as the SECF outcome

The end process of SECF is to achieve sustainable human development, in which the human development framework pillars – participation, empowerment, sustainability, equality and equity, productivity, and efficiency – ought to be realised. In achieving sustainable human development, it is essential to recognise that it is not simply a by-product of higher education but a deliberate, structured outcome of socially embedded pedagogical ecosystems. The SECF framework is designed as a capability-enhancing, aspirational intervention that promotes students' lived realities in support of broader social development goals. Through enabling conversion factors such as institutional support and entrepreneurial agency, students are equipped with technical skills and the capacity to lead meaningful lives. When students value their learning experiences, they contribute to community transformation and foster social

change. As observed by Bathula et al. (2025), HEIs embed sustainability and innovation into experiential learning platforms that develop socially responsive graduates capable of navigating and influencing complex development landscapes.

Importantly, the SECF asserts that sustainable human development is achieved when HEIs intentionally align their structures, practices, and values to support students to live a life with purpose. Furthermore, when HEIs' intentions are not only to produce graduates but also to create citizens with a mission to bring about positive change. This requires rethinking universities not as providers of credentials, but as enabling ecosystems that expand students' entrepreneurial capabilities to act for the public good. As Walker (2025) argued, universities that centre on human development ethics, such as justice, dignity, and inclusion, position themselves as agents of long-term transformation rather than gatekeepers of technical knowledge. This is what is expected in modern HEIs, as technical knowledge is abundantly available even to those without access to higher education. Therefore, HEIs' roles should be inspirational, or they risk becoming irrelevant as the world changes. In the SECF, conversion factors, agency capabilities, and functionings are built up to the outcome: sustainable human development. This is achieved when empowered graduates use their capabilities and entrepreneurial agency to create social value and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

The SECF shows that when SE is embedded within a supportive higher education ecosystem, it becomes a powerful driver of student development and broader human advancement. The findings presented in the empirical chapters (Chapters 5 to 8) showed that SE promotes empowerment by enabling students to take initiative, lead enterprises, and make meaningful decisions. These findings further suggest that SE education supports sustainability through student-led initiatives. These are socially conscious solutions that benefit communities and promote environmental stewardship. This was confirmed by the types of enterprises students worked for, as presented in Chapter 5. Students become co-creators of knowledge and impact in the SE ecosystem. Thus, the SECF considers active student participation, which enhances productivity, deepens learning, and expands their skills and capabilities. This further strengthens their contribution to higher education by informing the pedagogy and the knowledge to be shared and learned for sustainable development.

In Chapter 3, the theoretical foundation focused on the HDF and CA, and the importance of the five pillars of human development: empowerment, participation, sustainability, equity, and productivity was explained. The SECF builds on these pillars, showing how SE within higher education can promote these dimensions in students. This can be done through reimagining education as an ecosystem where knowledge is co-created. A system where students are allowed to learn by doing to internalise the attributes, such as critical thinking and leadership,

often valued by universities, as shown in their graduates' attributes lists[35]. While these lists may differ in structure and targets, they all centre on innovation, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, critical thinking, and community engagement. Therefore, these attributes attest to the development of student capabilities; in support of this, the SECF envisions an environment where students are not only empowered but also actively engaged in meaningful, transformative action. The importance of redefining the approach of student empowerment to engagement aligns with the CA scholarship, which asserts that true education must equip students with the agency and opportunity to contribute to societal well-being and sustainable development (Allais, 2022; Costantini et al., 2025; Walker, 2025).

The SECF therefore suggests an experiential approach to embedding the five pillars into everyday educational practice, towards developing a capable graduate university that seeks to achieve. SECF challenges HEIs and policymakers to shift from being knowledge factories to ecosystems of capability. This shift reimagines education as the pursuit of dignity, purpose, and public good, ensuring that students' development contributes to both individual flourishing and collective human development. By doing so, it reduces the mismatch between graduate skills and industry needs, as students would have been exposed to experiential SE platforms that require critical thinking, empathy, and effective communication.

9.3 Theoretical and practical contributions

The SECF offers a structured model for advancing theory and putting the value into practice by integrating SE, the HDF and CA to foreground student transformation in higher education. While SE literature, as reviewed in Chapter 3, often focuses on enterprise outcomes, it pays limited attention to how students convert SE opportunities into capabilities. Similarly, the CA has been underutilised in exploring the real-life application of social entrepreneurial experiences in higher education. The SECF positions entrepreneurial agency as the driver that enables students to lead, innovate, and create social value.

By linking the SE's emphasis on purpose and impact with the CA's focus on students living lives they value and the HDF's concern for sustainable well-being, the SECF weaves these elements into a practical model for HEIs. It reframes the university not just as a place for skills

[35] These are institutional lists set to have developed in students upon graduation. In this study, the two institutions have their own lists; however, they share related attributes. For UFS: https://www.ufs.ac.za/ctl/home-page/events/graduate-attributes and for CUT: https://www.cut.ac.za/graduate-attributes (Accessed 25 Sept 2025)

training, but as a transformative environment where students grow, act with purpose, and become agents of change as they acquire knowledge through mainstream academic programmes and build on SE experiential experiences.

Furthermore, the SECF reconceptualises functionings in HEIs to include outcomes beyond academic performance, such as resilience, critical thinking, and civic engagement, nurtured through experiential SE projects. It shows how these capabilities emerge from the dynamic interaction between institutional environments, conversion factors, and entrepreneurial agency. Doing so bridges theory and practice and extends the HDF by operationalising pillars such as empowerment, participation, and equity through real-world, student-led innovation.

Ultimately, this theoretical contribution redefines graduate success not solely in terms of employability but also by expanding students' freedom to lead meaningful and impactful lives. The SECF thus provides a fresh and nuanced lens for understanding how SE in HEIs can drive inclusive, sustainable human development.

9.4 Bringing the human development framework and capability approach into conversation

As the study integrated the HDF and CA to offer a robust, co-constitutive lens through which to understand the role of SE in enhancing human development in higher education, the results were presented using the CA lens. This section provides a link to the key findings and their relationship to the HDF pillars, as shown in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 The relationship of empirical findings to the human development framework

Main finding	Description	Aligned pillars of the human development framework
Entrepreneurial agency through social entrepreneurship (SE)	SE enables student leadership and initiative	Empowerment, participation, equality and equity
	Agency freedom leads to project ownership and systemic change	Empowerment, participation
	Personal, collective, and relational agency enhances peer learning and growth.	Empowerment, participation, equality/equity
Functionings as tangible outcomes of SE	Students gain project management, leadership, and innovation skills	Empowerment, productivity, and efficiency
	SE initiatives create community impact (e.g., training, waste reuse)	Equality, sustainability

	Functionings develop beyond the curriculum (resilience, adaptability)	Empowerment, sustainability
Conversion factors influencing SE impact	Social factors: Peer networks, mentorship, and institutional recognition	Equality, empowerment
	Personal factors: Motivation, cognitive skills, and confidence	Empowerment, participation
	Environmental factors: Infrastructure, geographic context	Equality, sustainability

Source: Author's own (2025)

The empirical results presented in Chapters 5 to 8 and summarised in Table 9.1 show how they operationalise the HDF pillars in overlapping and intersectional ways. This gives a structured explanation of how students develop skills through participating in SE, using Enactus lenses.

9.4.1 Entrepreneurial agency for human development in social entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurial agency, as presented in the form of personal, relational, collective, and transformative agency, reflects the capacity of individuals to act purposefully and make meaningful choices that influence their own circumstances and those of others. The HDF simplified development to consider how individuals have opportunities to expand their freedoms and options, allowing them to live lives they value. At its core, it promotes empowerment, enabling students to lead and participate in decisions aimed at improving their wellbeing and that of others. It further enhances equity by promoting access to the means of production, quality education, and sustainability through the reuse and sharing of resources, thereby reducing environmental damage and pollution. All these pillars are interrelated and shape a holistic process of human advancement (Haq, 1995; Fukuda-Parr, 2003). Thus, the above view extends how HDF goes beyond economic activity to encompass the freedom to innovate, collaborate, and drive change. Both the HDF and the entrepreneurial agency, therefore, converge on the understanding that development is not only about outcomes but also about the process through which individuals exercise their power to shape their futures while acquiring skills and capabilities.

Viewed through the lens of the HDF, entrepreneurial agency becomes a practical mechanism for realising the five human development pillars. Empowerment is demonstrated when entrepreneurs identify opportunities and mobilise resources to overcome structural barriers. Participation manifests through teamwork, peer learning, and collective problem-solving, while equity is advanced when inclusive entrepreneurship enables marginalised individuals and

groups to act on their aspirations. Sustainability aligns with the long-term vision of social entrepreneurship that balances social, economic, and environmental goals. Productivity and efficiency are achieved when individuals transform available resources into functionings that enhance livelihoods and community wellbeing. In this sense, entrepreneurial agency operationalises the HDF by translating its principles into lived experiences of creativity, innovation, and growth.

As illustrated by the Enactus initiatives explained in this study, entrepreneurial agency captures the transformative potential of human development. Students demonstrated leadership, initiative, and a sense of ownership over their enterprises, showing empowerment and active participation. Student entrepreneurial agency expanded from personal to collective and relational, and to transformative levels. This enabled peer learning and shared growth. Through this process, agency freedom led to innovation, as seen in the types of enterprises they work on, inclusion, as reflected in the kinds of collaborations they pursued, and systemic change, such as initiatives to address educational problems. These outcomes align with the HDF pillars of empowerment, participation, and equity. Therefore, entrepreneurial agency serves as a bridge between learning and practice, linking students' development journeys to broader human development ideals by fostering the freedom and capability to act for themselves and others.

9.4.2 Functionings as tangible outcomes of social entrepreneurship: Linking practice to human development

The findings showed that SE enables students to convert their knowledge and experiences into meaningful "doings" and "beings", which the CA defines as functionings. These outcomes are not limited to academic performance but also include experiential outcomes that change people's lives and improve their economic and social participation. For instance, how students contributed to training Vermi Village, improving farm yields in the Bio Pro Fly, and improving skills in NGO compliance training in an Enactus-harmony collaborative project.

These outcomes show how SE nurtures capabilities directly aligned with empowerment, productivity, sustainability, equality, and efficiency. These outcomes can be seen through active participation, which bolstered experiential learning capabilities that deepened student engagement beyond traditional curricula. This is evident in the enterprises presented in Chapter 5, which show how students interacted with the beneficiaries and stakeholders involved. By applying theoretical knowledge to social challenges, students experienced personal and collective development, enhancing their ability to lead, adapt, and innovate. SE becomes more

than an extracurricular activity, becoming a capability-enhancing activity that HEIs can tap into to leverage its potential as a platform that puts the theory learnt into practice. Realising its transformative potential, HEIs can leverage their ability to empower students through hands-on activities, enhancing productivity and promoting sustainable social development. This reinforces the developmental role of HEIs as enablers of human flourishing and social impact, not only through formal teaching but through transformative, purpose-driven practice.

9.4.3 Conversion factors as enabling/constraining student capabilities and functionings

What students achieved and valued through SE was shaped by the enabling or limiting conditions that affected their participation in SE initiatives. These findings show that functionings and capabilities do not emerge in isolation; they are deeply influenced by the context in which students are embedded and by how the environment responds to students' agency.

The conversion factors play a role in determining levels of empowerment, student participation, equality, and the enterprise's sustainability. For instance, peer networks and mentorship foster empowerment and equality by sharing ideas and working together toward a common goal: social impact and skills development. Additionally, recognition and support from institutions promote participation, expanding student exposure and broadening social impact while enlarging student freedoms and opportunities to act on social and economic issues they value. The SECF highlighted that for SE to advance human development, institutions should actively recognise enabling conversion factors and address constraining factors to fully capitalise on these platforms to develop graduates with the qualifications and experiential skills. Through this process, an equitable, inclusive, and supportive ecosystem is enabled, enabling students to turn opportunities into real, impactful capabilities, positioning HEIs as drivers of long-term social transformation and student development, in addition to providing academic credentials.

9.4.4 Social entrepreneurship capability framework as an explanatory tool

The SECF is a conceptual tool for explaining how SE fosters student transformation within higher education. Aligning theoretical insights from the HDF and CA helps make sense of the complex relationship among student choice, institutional support, and developmental outcomes. Specifically, the SECF highlights how personal, collective, and relational entrepreneurial agency is nurtured through SE initiatives, enabling students to lead, innovate, and take ownership of their learning journeys. These forms of agency are closely tied to the HDF pillars of empowerment, participation, and equality, as evidenced by students' development of leadership, peer learning, and the ability to influence change.

Functionings are presented in the SECF not as by-products but as core outcomes of experiential learning through SE. These outcomes aligned with HDF goals, such as sustainability, productivity, and social impact, demonstrating the educational value of SE beyond academic performance. This has been labelled a mismatch with industry needs, which then positions experiential learning as providing insights into what can be taught to align with real-world needs. Moreover, by surfacing the role of conversion factors, the SECF explains why some students thrive in SE spaces while others are constrained.

In doing so, the SECF, as a novel contribution of this study, broadens the focus on student success from narrow metrics like employability to broader indicators of human development, including entrepreneurial agency, capability expansion, meaningful societal contribution, and sustainable impact. The model urges HEIs to adopt a developmental lens that values participation, purpose, and long-term effects. This dual role of the SECF as both a theoretical framework and a practical guide positions it as a distinctive contribution to debates on the role of SE in transforming higher education for sustainable human development.

9.5 Conclusion, implications, and final reflections

This section concludes the thesis, reflecting on the journey undertaken, the insights uncovered, and the future possibilities.

9.5.1 Reimagining higher education institutions through social entrepreneurship

This study sought to respond to the following objectives:

1. **To understand students' perceptions of the role of SE in advancing human development in higher education.**

In response to this objective, Chapter 5 provided the context of SE initiatives that students practice in higher education. Chapter 6 presented students' perspectives on advancing human development, which were then unfolded into interrelated personal, professional, and social development.

2. **To examine how SE initiatives influence the development of specific students' capabilities in South African HEIs.**

Using the enterprises presented in Chapter 5 for context, this objective was addressed in Chapter 7, where functionings, capabilities and entrepreneurial agency were presented, showing how student participation in SE through Enactus enhances their skills and capabilities and creates social impact for sustainable human development.

3. **To identify the factors that promote or constrain the effectiveness of Enactus in enhancing student capabilities within South African HEIs.**

In response to this objective, Chapter 8 provided conversion factors, which were the conditions that either enhance or constrain functionings and capabilities. These were categorised into interrelated social, personal and environmental dimensions.

4. **To develop a framework, based on the data, on how HEIs can capitalise on the SE outcomes for human development to achieve their sustainable development mandate.**

This was the last objective addressed in the first part of Chapter 9 (from section 9.2 to 9.4), where the SECF was conceptualised, calling on HEIs to leverage the potential benefits of SE as presented in Chapters 5 to 8.

The results of this study showed that SE is a strong force for professional growth in higher education. Using student stories and qualitative analysis, we found that SE is more than just an extracurricular activity; it is a way for students to change and become what they value. Students can actively shape inclusive and sustainable futures by using the skills they learn. This needs HEI systems that can respond to this to happen. Because of this, the SECF proposed in this study suggests that universities reposition themselves as places that produce knowledge and enhance human flourishing, with students playing a role in making social change.

9.5.2 Policy and institutional implications

Through the lens of the SECF, this study gave strategic views for rethinking higher education policy and practice. At its core, the SECF challenges the notion that universities are only places where people get credentials and instead sees them as places where people can grow. It implicitly suggests expanding narrow performance indicators, such as focusing on academic credentialing and training graduates to become employment prospects, towards developmental indicators that show how students are growing as people and making an impact in the world.

For university leaders to do this, the SE philosophy needs to be built into the core curriculum development. Although its inclusion in the curriculum development may not necessarily make it a compulsory learning-and-doing unit, not every student would want to be a social entrepreneur. However, the impact stories of participating students are likely to inform the direction the university could take when creating such platforms for graduate development.

At a national level, the SECF aligns with the National Development Plan 2030. It gives HEIs a way to contribute to inclusive development plans. Through strategic frameworks and resource allocation, policymakers should be encouraged to support SE integration, as this aligns with

the UNGA (2023) resolutions on the potential of social enterprises to address inequalities and create employment opportunities. Expanding the resolution's focus to include students and higher learning institutions is noble, as they are the custodians of the future, and these opportunities are created to enable the younger generation to live a life of value.

From the findings and recommendations, SE has the potential to be transformative; institutions and policies must align to create environments that foster students' thriving as co-creators of change and agents of public good.

9.5.3 Study limitations and positional reflections

While the study's focus was to share and appreciate the potential of SE to enhance students' capabilities, this inquiry also considers opportunities for improvement and limitations. These limitations enhance the study's context-sensitivity, methodological integrity, and growth potential.

The qualitative, interpretive case study used interviews, FGDs, and document reviews from two universities with active Enactus teams. This design gave rich, situated insights into student lives by prioritising depth over breadth. However, the findings were limited by these institutions' contextual realities and may not reflect SE from different institutions. This study provides a base for how students' capabilities and skills can be developed through SE. This presents an opportunity to further such inquiry, which will likely add to the impact of the proposition of SE in higher education ecosystems. The nature of the case study investigation and purposive sampling targeted SE ecosystem (Enactus) participants, contextualising the findings. While qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalisation, similar results should not be assumed in institutions with different socio-economic or institutional contexts.

However, the conceptual depth of the SECF provides a transferable heuristic template to other HEIs and policymakers, especially those interested in aligning education with sustainable human development goals. The SECF utility and relevance beyond this context will depend on future research, particularly longitudinal and comparative studies across different institutional settings, while also appreciating that human development is dynamic and context-specific. Hence, HDF views development as a means of expanding individual choices and freedoms.

My background as an Enactus student leader at another university during my undergraduate studies and as an academic researcher shaped the research process. This dual identity fostered trust and provided study-enhancing spaces and perspectives. However, it may also risk over-identification and interpretation bias. To address this, I used journaling, peer debriefing, triangulation, and peer validation to improve the study's rigour and ethical relevance.

These limitations reflected the study's intellectual humility and its deliberate methodological choices. They highlighted the study's contextual and student-centred lens, acknowledging that the findings were rooted in specific institutional and experiential realities. Importantly, they reinforced the study's main aim: To critically examine how SE, as practised through Enactus in South African higher education institutions, enhances students' capabilities and agency for human development, by exploring perceptions, identifying enabling and constraining factors, and theorising a framework that could potentially guide how higher education can capitalise on the transformative role of SE.

9.5.3.1 Positionality revisited

Beyond these methodological limitations presented above, I revisit how my positionality functioned as an interpretive condition shaping meaning-making across the study. It is important to reflect on this because, within the interpretivist framework guiding this study, positionality is treated as an analytic condition rather than a source of bias to be eliminated. My dual insider–outsider position, shaped by prior involvement as an Enactus student leader and my current role as an SE researcher, influenced access, interpretation, and the co-construction of meaning. This positionality enabled rich contextual insight while simultaneously requiring deliberate reflexive engagement to sustain analytical distance.

Across the thesis, reflexivity was therefore enacted as an ongoing analytical practice. The analytical stance was progressively refined from descriptive and affirming accounts towards deeper interpretive interrogation, with Enactus examined as a contingent and context-dependent intervention across Sections 7.3, 8.4, and this concluding section. These analyses foreground structural and programmatic constraints, uneven student experiences, and mediated capability conversion, demonstrating that student outcomes are neither uniform nor guaranteed across participants.

Revisiting positionality in the conclusion aims to reinforce the study's commitment to interpretive transparency, reflexive accountability, and analytic rigour. I approached participant narratives as situated meanings rather than singular truths, with divergences and contradictions treated as analytically productive. This reflexive positioning strengthens the study's credibility by making visible the relational nature of qualitative inquiry and providing a foundation for more explicit engagement with insider–outsider dynamics in future research.

9.5.4 Reflexive interrogation of student narratives and Enactus limitations

This thesis focuses on students' perspectives to understand how involvement in Enactus fosters capability development and human development in higher education. Nevertheless, these narratives are not regarded as a singular or conclusive truth. Student accounts are shaped by positionality, aspiration, and retrospective reflection, necessitating critical examination to avoid essentializing Enactus as a uniformly positive or flawless intervention. As indicated across the empirical chapters, a critical analysis of the data revealed that students in leadership positions or those involved in Enactus initiatives for longer periods expressed more robust positive perceptions of leadership, confidence, and impact. Thus, these findings are justified by Sen's CA, which suggests that sustained engagement and responsibility enhance opportunities to convert participation into valued capabilities. On the other hand, participants with shorter or less intense engagement in the organisation were less prominent in the narratives, suggesting different experiences and results. Thus, Chapter 8 has more Alumni reflections. This suggest that they had been on the team for a longer time and, having been exposed outside the university environment, offer a more balanced reflection on their participation and how it shaped their development trajectories into who they were at the time of data collection.

The competitive nature of Enactus may also promote success-oriented storytelling, prioritising achievement and impact over challenges like project discontinuity, leadership turnover, and conflicts between academic and extracurricular demands. This is a common trend in storytelling, where the influence of failures is often neglected because it is seen as having no impact on the trajectory of success (Sachs, 2012). Furthermore, the researcher, having previously participated in Enactus, recognises the necessity of reflexivity (as provided in Chapters 1 and 4) to prevent the romanticisation of these experiences, but provides a balanced scholarly presentation. By examining student narratives and emphasising variation and limitations, the study offers a nuanced perspective of Enactus as a context-specific, capability-enhancing environment rather than a universally transformative initiative.

9.6 Recommendations for research and practice

This study used a case of two universities; therefore, to broaden the understanding of how SE expand students' skills and capabilities, a broader and wider study would be ideal, such as longitudinal studies that track alumni pathways and sustained capability development, even in other forms of student networks with similar intentions like Enactus. Such studies would help validate the sustainable value of SE beyond the classroom.

There is potential in investigating how SE ecosystems within can be scaled and promoted, ensuring inclusive access to capability-building opportunities.

Third, there is a need to develop capability-based evaluation frameworks that move beyond conventional outputs to assess student agency, ethical leadership, and social impact, rather than relying solely on theory-based tests, especially in the humanities.

HEIs could consider piloting the integration of SE into credit-bearing modules and graduate attribute portfolios. By doing this, they are likely encouraging students to engage in hands-on initiatives that authenticate the institutional graduate attributes through experiential practice and expand the social impact objectives.

9.7 Final reflection: A vision for capability-oriented higher education

This study has journeyed through the voices, struggles, and aspirations of students who engaged in SE, not merely as a project, but as a path to becoming capable, purposeful, and socially responsive. Through this work, I have seen higher education not as a pipeline to employment or a stage for academic performance, but as a profound human space. On this platform, students can imagine and realise lives that they have reason to value.

Drawing from the HDF and CA, this thesis introduced the SECF, a model grounded in lived experience, designed to help institutions unlock the full potential of student-led innovation for sustainable development. But more than a framework, SECF is a call to action, a challenge to universities to move beyond credentialing and cultivate ecosystems that expand agency, justice, and dignity.

As a scholar-practitioner and former Enactus participant, this research has also been personal. Drawing from the findings, it has illuminated my understanding that when students are trusted, supported, and given space to lead, they do not just acquire skills; they transform systems. They do not wait to be empowered. They act. They lead and inspire, which the ever-changing world requires.

I argue that the future of transformative, socially relevant and developmental higher education depends on its ability to cultivate student capabilities, align learning with sustainable human development (purpose), and create lasting personal and social value. This study's findings have shown that integrating SE initiatives meaningfully into the academic environment can lay the foundation for a new, human-centred academic culture that prepares students to navigate and transform a complex world.

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The appendices presented below remain as originally obtained and distributed for authenticity. No names of participants are presented in any of them.

Appendix 1: University of the Free State ethical clearance letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA
UFS UV

GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

11-Dec-2023

Dear Mr Crespen Ndlovu

Application Approved

Research Project Title:
Enhancing Human Development through Social Entrepreneurship: The Case of Enactus in South African Higher Education Institutions

Ethical Clearance number:
UFS-HSD2023/1880

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely
Dr Adri Du Plessis
Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Adri Du Plessis
Digitally signed by Adri Du Plessis
Date: 2023.12.11 16:56:41 +02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela Drive
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South Africa

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duplessisA@ufs.ac.za
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Appendix 2: Central University of Technology gate keepers' approval letter

Central University of Technology, Free State

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

C NDLOVU

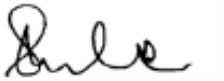
PERMISSION FOR CRESPEN NDLOVU TO CONDUCT HIS RESEARCH AT CUT ENTITLED "ENHANCING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CASE OF ENACTUS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS".

Dear Mr. Ndlovu

This is to confirm that you have been granted permission to conduct research at the Central University of Technology for your doctorate research project entitled "Enhancing Human Development through Social Entrepreneurship: The Case of Enactus in South African Higher Education Institutions".

The conditions of the conditional permission are:

- The research will not interrupt any of the official activities at The Central University of Technology;
- You will supply us with the copy of your report;
- The cost of all related activities will be covered by yourself;
- Recruitment of participants is the sole responsibility of yourself;
- Voluntary nature of the potential participants decision to consent to participate should be strictly observed;
- You should not disclose a potential participant's decision to participate or otherwise to any other party;
- Permission does not compel, in any sense, participation of staff members or students in your research.



Senior Director: Institutional Planning and Quality Enhancement

Mr. I Mokhele 05/12/2023

Appendix 3: Enactus South Africa letter of authorisation to conduct study



Enactus South Africa NPC
PostNet Suite
305
Private Bag X30500
HOUGHTON
South Africa
2041

CEO Cell: +27(0)82 804 175
Registration No:
2002/004683/08
Income Tax Ref Number: 9075 423 146
VAT Registration No: 4440266254
Registered PBO with 18A
Status
PBO Ref No: 930020047
Empowerdex (EVS) Rated:
Sector: Education and Development
Black Beneficiary Base: 100%

20 November 2023

RE: Letter of authorisation to conduct study with Enactus

To whom it may concern

Enactus is an international non-profit organisation founded in the United States of America in 1975. Active on more than 1600 university campuses in 34 countries, Enactus teams create economic opportunities in their communities by organising educational outreach projects to effect positive change.

The organisation's first presence in South Africa was in 2001 (formerly Students in Free Enterprise). Enactus in South Africa has since expanded to 26 higher education institutions currently committed to utilising this leadership development programme to offer students work-integrated learning opportunities.

Enactus brings together student, academic and business leaders committed to using the power of entrepreneurial action to improve the quality of life and standard of living for people in need. Guided by academic advisors and business experts, the student leaders of Enactus create and implement community empowerment projects around the globe. The experience not only transforms lives but also helps students develop the kind of talent and perspective that are essential to leadership in an ever-more complicated and challenging world.

Mr Crespen Ndlovu was an active member of this organisation, and I have worked closely with him for a number of years as a member of the Enactus University of Venda Team. His commitment, passion and diligence have always been outstanding and commendable. Mr Ndlovu continues his relationship with our organisation as an alumnus who is always available to assist in our programme in different capacities.

In my capacity as an Enactus South Africa Program Director, I grant Mr Crespen Ndlovu authorisation to conduct his research and study within our programme. This allows Mr Ndlovu to contact the Enactus Alumni and our current student members.

Sincerely,

Bheki Mdzikwa



Programme Director
082 804 9785

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Chairperson: Kuslie Mtunzi-Hairwadzi, General Manager, MTN SA Foundation | **Vice-Chairman:** Mashego Mashego, Executive Director, Harmony Gold Mining Co Ltd | Carl Ballot, Independent Contractor: Strategic Marketing, Communications and Corporate Citizenship Advisory, and Coach | Makgotso Letsitsi, Executive Director, Transformation and Citizenship, KPMG (Proprietary) Ltd | Jackie Mathebula, Director, Aurik Business Accelerator and Enterprise Development | Charles Reed, Executive Director & Founder, Mycelium South Africa, Entrepreneur & Enterprise Development Specialist | Jurie Welman, Executive Director, Welman Advisory | **Chief Executive Officer & Country Director:** Letitia de Wet

Appendix 4a: Research study information leaflet and consent form for participants

DATE October 2023- October 2024

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Enhancing Human Development through Social Entrepreneurship: The Case of Enactus in South African Higher Education Institutions

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Crespen Ndlovu 20249285540810999439 FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

Economics and Management Sciences

Centre for Development Support

STUDY LEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Prof Faith W Mkwananzi Prof. Deidre Van Rooyen

MkwananziWF@ufs.ac.za griesd@ufs.ac.za

051 401 7566 051 401 3812

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The study aims to critically examine how social entrepreneurship, through Enactus, can enhance student capabilities for human development in South African higher education institutions.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

I am going to do the research. I'm a registered PhD. Research fellow at Higher Education and Human Development under the Centre for Development Support.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

The research project will adhere to the University of the Free State and Central University of Technology research rules from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS and Central University of Technology, which requires that all ethical research guidelines be followed. The questions will follow the guidelines for a moral, academic research project. Please refer to the participants' information sheets and informed consent forms attached for more information on this study.

Approval number: UFSHSD2023/1880

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

Using Enactus as a case study, the study requires understanding students', alumni's, and staff's perceptions of how social entrepreneurship can enhance human development in tertiary education institutions. The Central University of Technology (CUT) and the University of the Free State (UFS) will be chosen as the case for the study. CUT was selected because it is the 2022-2023 Enactus national champion, providing the best practices for South African Enactus' social entrepreneurial initiatives. The UFS team is chosen because it represents the founding Enactus team in South Africa. This will help to understand the motivations behind pioneering Enactus in South Africa and how the current students and the institution support the team. Alumni are included in the study to examine how their participation in Enactus may have influenced their career choices and life decisions outside the university. Enactus Alumni will also be interviewed to understand how participating in Enactus helped develop specific skills that non-participating students may not acquire, and how it influenced their career choices and personal and professional growth. One Faculty Advisor from each institution and one Enactus representative staff member will form part of the participants. Enactus representatives and Faculty Advisors are to provide an executive-level view of students' involvement and to understand the Enactus philosophy.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The participant's role in the study is to respond to survey questions during a semi-structured interview voluntarily. Participant's consent will be requested to audiotape the interview proceedings. The study's main research questions are: 1) What are students' perceptions of the role of Enactus in enhancing their capabilities for human development? 2) In what specific ways do Enactus initiatives influence the development of capabilities among participating students? 3) What factors promote or constrain the effectiveness of Enactus initiatives in enhancing student capabilities? Each interview is expected to last between 45 and 60 minutes. The possible risk to participants is being interviewed during class and study time. There is nothing painful about participating in this study, as it is a verbal interview without any physical examination.

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Participation in this study is voluntary, and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without providing a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no financial or material benefits for taking part in this study. However, the potential academic benefit of participating in this study is that participants' voices will shape perceptions

of the benefits of social entrepreneurship in higher education institutions. Sharing experiences that could contribute to understanding the role of social entrepreneurship in higher education could inform the policy and practice of social entrepreneurship in tertiary institutions.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is a very low potential for risks, inconvenience, and/or discomfort to the participant. This may affect their study times during the interview. However, the interview will be conducted at the participant's flexible time. Moreover, personal data will be safeguarded by not sharing information with others. Participation will require your time. The semi-structured interviews will last 45-60 minutes. There are no foreseeable risks of harm or side effects to the potential participants. Participation in this study will not be painful, as it is a best-practice verbal interview without any physical examination.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

I am aware of the POPI Act; as such, any personal information that may reveal your identity will be kept confidential or anonymous, such as your name, educational institution, occupation, location, or current job. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer and destroyed upon completion of the study. Personal data will be safeguarded by not sharing information with others. Interviews will be conducted in seclusion, and the information collected will be used for academic purposes only and carefully stored on a password-protected personal computer. Pseudonyms will be used where possible. Only the researcher and study supervisors will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed after the study to prevent the disclosure of sensitive or personal information.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher and study supervisors will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed using a shredding machine and wiped (deleted) from the computer after the study to hide sensitive information.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. There is no physical or psychological risk of being in the study. Personal data will be safeguarded by not sharing information with others. Participation in the study will be anonymous and voluntary. The respondents will not be identified, and the information they share will be kept confidential. Participants will not suffer any negative consequences in the study, as their views will be kept confidential.

HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

This study will be written up as a research report and will be available online on the University of the Free State library website. If you would like a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you upon request. If you would like to be informed of the final research findings or have any questions, please get in touch with the researcher at +27 0810999439 or email 2024928554@ufs4life.ac.za. Feel free to call Prof Faith Mkwananzi, the candidate's supervisor, on +27 51 401 7566. E-mail Address: MkwananziWF@ufs.ac.za or the co-supervisor Prof Deidre van Rooyen at griesd@ufs.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, the undersigned,

_____

(participant's full names to be included), (the "Participant")

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

_____ (the "Study") in relation to

_____

_____

and which Study is being conducted by

_____

(insert the name of the researcher), (the "Researcher").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

1. The researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;

2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as described in the attached information sheet;

3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;

4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);

5. I voluntarily provide UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal data to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;

6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;

7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;

8. I also permit UFS to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, and the safekeeping of information, as well as the other issues listed above.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the interview.

Full Name of Participant:
_____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:
_____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):
_____

Signature of Researcher: _____Date:
_____

Appendix 4b: Student interview guide

During the interviews and focus group discussions (Appendix- 4a-5b), the interviewee details/attendance register was used to record participants' demographic information. This information was utilised solely for data coding and analysis. All verbatim quotations presented in the thesis are anonymised through a coding system based on participant number and category, with identifiers known only to the researcher. These records are securely stored and will be destroyed in accordance with the University's ethical standards and guidelines.

Date _____

Institution_____

Demographic Information

Gender_____
Faculty_____
Department_____

Level of study _____

Programme of study_____

Contact No./Email_____

1. Tell me about your involvement with Enactus
2. What do you do in Enactus?
3. When did you join Enactus?
4. Which enterprises are you part of?

a. Why did you choose the enterprise you are part of- did you have a choice?

5. What have you learned through participating in Enactus? (Please give me specific skills and experiences.)

a. Have you gotten any new knowledge that you think you might not have had if you had not been part of Enactus?

b. How do you envisage using this knowledge?

c. Are you applying this knowledge currently in any way? Where?

d. How does it contribute to your teaching and learning experience in the university as a whole?

6. Through Enactus, how do you aim to:

a. Improving people's lives?

b. Protecting the planet?

c. Acquiring entrepreneurial skills?

d. Participating in your community/village?

7. Are you aware of any other entrepreneurial organisation:

a. On-campus

b. Any other university

8. What do you think makes Enactus unique from other entrepreneurial student organisations on campus and in different universities?

9. How do you balance your academic responsibilities and participating in Enactus?

10. Is there anything that you think should change or be added to improve Enactus?

11. How does participation in Enactus initiatives impact:

a. Your academic performance?

b. Career prospects?

c. Social life?

12. How do you think the following can support your Enactus initiatives?

a. the university,

b. Faculty Advisors,

c. Alumni

d. Enactus South Africa

e. Businesspeople/ Corporate

13. What advice would you give to a student wishing to join Enactus?

14. Do you think all students should have the opportunity to participate in Enactus?

15. How do you think you are different from other students who are not participating in Enactus?

16. What other factors affect the execution of your enterprises?

a. How can the above factors be managed?

17. How do you understand the role of Enactus in making you brighter and happier over time

18. What challenges have you faced while participating in Enactus initiatives?

a. How did you overcome them?

19. Do you have any other overarching thing that you want me to know about the importance of Enactus in your life, which we did not talk about?

Appendix 4c: Alumni interview guide

Interview Guide Enactus Alumni

Date: _____

Demographic Information

Gender_____

Profession_____

Position_____

Contact/email_____
_____

1. Tell me about your involvement with Enactus.

a. Which university were you part of?

2. In which years were you part of Enactus?

3. What were you doing in Enactus?

4. What kind of projects were you involved in?

a. Which project were you part of in Enactus?

b. Why did you choose the project you were part of- did you have a choice?

5. What did you learn through participating in Enactus? (Please give me specific skills and experiences)

a. Was there any new knowledge that you think you might not have had if you were not part of Enactus?

b. How are you using this knowledge?

c. Are you applying this knowledge currently in any way? Where?

6. How did Enactus contribute to your university teaching and learning experience?

7. Through Enactus, how were you:

a. Improving people's lives?

b. Protecting the planet?

c. Acquiring entrepreneurial skills?

d. Participating in your community/village

8. Were you aware of any other entrepreneurial organisation:

a. That were operating on-campus during your time?

b. In any other universities?

9. What do you think made Enactus unique from other entrepreneurial student organisations on campus and in other universities?

10. How did you balance your academic responsibilities and participating in Enactus?

11. Is there anything you think should be changed or added to make Enactus more impactful to:

a. Students?

b. Community?

12. How did participating in Enactus initiatives impact:

a. Your academic performance?

b. Career prospects?

13. What advice would you give a student wishing to join Enactus?

14. Do you think all students should have the opportunity to participate in Enactus?

15. How do you think you were different from other students who were not participating in Enactus?

16. What challenges did you face while participating in Enactus initiatives?

a. How did you overcome them?

17. How do you think the following can support Enactus initiatives?

a. the university,

b. Faculty Advisors,

c. Alumni (you and other alumni)

d. Enactus South Africa

e. Corporates (businesspeople)

18. Do you have any other overarching thing that you want me to know about the importance of Enactus in your life, which we did not mention above?

Appendix 4d: Faculty Advisor and Enactus Representative Interview Guide

Date_____

Demographic Information

Gender_____

Position_____

Contact/Email_____

1. Tell me about your involvement with Enactus
2. What do you do as part of Enactus
3. How and why did Enactus start?

a. What is Enactus? (What are the objectives of Enactus?)

4. How does Enactus align with national and international development goals like ensuring quality education, improving people's lives, etc.?
5. What makes Enactus unique from other entrepreneurial student organisations nationwide?
6. How does Enactus promote pillars of development, such as:

a. Empowerment
b. Participation
c. Productivity and efficiency
d. Equity
e. Sustainability
f. Innovation
g. Entrepreneurship, etc

7. How do you select institutions to be part of the Enactus network?
8. How has student participation evolved since Enactus' inception in South Africa

a. Do you have records showing the above
b. What do the changes mean to you or to Enactus South Africa

9. What makes Enactus students unique from non-participating students?

a. What makes you proud when working with tertiary students?
b. What do you think are the long-term benefits for students participating in Enactus?

10. Do you have any student success stories you can share which are a result of being part of the Enactus network?
11. How can the following people do better to enhance the students' impact

a. Students
b. Alumni
c. Universities
d. Business leaders or the corporate
e. Government

12. What would you like to see developing in students for the next 5-10 years
13. Do you have any other overarching thing that you want me to know about Enactus and its effects to students and university?

Appendix 5a: Student Focus group discussion guide attendance register

Enhancing human development through SE: A case study of Enactus in South African higher education

Date _____ Time _____

Institution_____ Venue_____

	Name	Gender	Faculty/Department	Level of study	Contact	Email	Signature
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							

Appendix 5b: Focus group discussion guide

ACTIVITY 1
INTRODUCTIONS



Introduce yourself using the sport of your choice as an Enactus team

a) When you joined Enactus
b) Why did you join Enactus
c) The role you play (the position you play and why)
d) What enterprises you are involved in?

ACTIVITY 2
UNDERSTANDING THE ENACTUS JOURNEY – RIVER OF LIFE

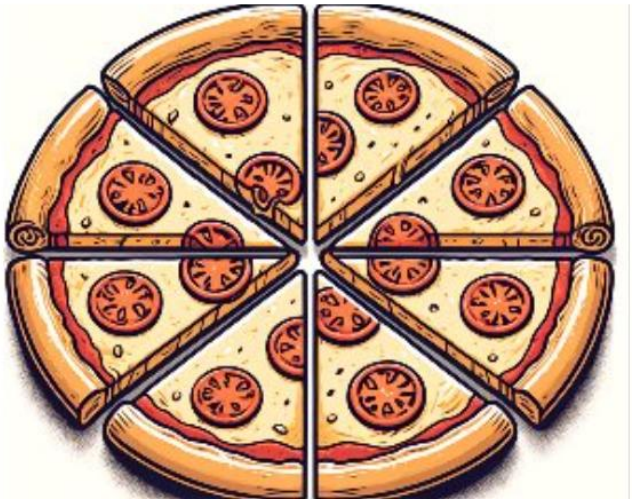


•Reflecting on your time with Enactus' journey, using a river as an example; how do you relate your journey experiences to what can be found within a river from its sources to mouth? What lessons do you get from these identified elements as it flows down?

ACTIVITY 3
THE MOSAIC ENACTUS PIZZA

Suppose Enactus is a Pizza with five slices. Which slice will be bigger percentage and why?

a) Empowerment,
b) Equity/Equality
c) Productivity/Innovation
d) Sustainability
e) Participation



ACTIVITY 4
STAKEHOLDER MAPPING



a) Identify stakeholders that support Enactus initiatives to enhance their impact on students and sustainable development.

b) How would you share R100 with the identified stakeholders in order of importance/influence/their roles and contributions to enhancing Enactus student' skills and competencies



c) How do they promote/ disturb progress in/for Enactus

Appendix 6: English editor's letter

Dorathea (Dora) du Plessis
Language Editing | Technical Editing

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Langenhovenpark, Bloemfontein 9330
technicalediting.dora@gmail.com

082 635 0214

08 October 2025

CONFIRMATION OF EDITING AND PROOFREADING

I hereby confirm that I have done the proofreading and technical editing for the following doctoral thesis:

Student:	Crespen Ndlovu
Student number:	2024928554
Title:	Enhancing human devt through social entrepreneurship: The case of Enactus in South African Higher Education Institutions
Degree:	Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies
Department:	Centre for Development Studies
University:	University of the Free State

Technical editing included the layout done on an MS Word template I created specifically for this document. I cross-checked the list of references and made notes for the student where references still had to be added or where details could not be found. I also did an internet search for each source and added DOI numbers and URLs where necessary.

Language editing included consistency and accuracy in grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure. I tried to keep as much as possible of the student's writing style while making sure that the student's intended meaning was not altered in the editing process. All amendments were marked with the Microsoft Word track changes feature. I also left comments for issues that the student had to double-check or revise. The student thus had the option to accept or reject the changes.

I have 45 years of experience in typing, editing, and proofreading for postgraduate students from universities all over South Africa and abroad. I gained experience during the years I was typing student dissertations and theses, and while working at different departments at the UFS. I also assisted in compiling a document on technical layout and referencing methods and have presented guest lectures on referencing methods and technical layout issues to postgraduate students at the University of the Free State. In the past couple of years, I have proofread seven books for publication, plus several journal articles.

Disclaimer: The ultimate responsibility for accepting or rejecting the amendments and recommendations made through the use of track changes rests with the student. As a language and technical editor, I cannot be held responsible for any changes in terms of format and style resulting from subsequent additions to the document, or any language issues that may have emerged as a result of subsequent amendments to the text. I also have not verified whether the student has incorporated all the relevant suggestions.

Yours sincerely

Dorathea du Plessis
Technical & Language Editor

Appendix 7: Turnitin report

Final Thesis_Draft_Crespen Ndlovu Jan 24 2026.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

7%	4%	6%	1%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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