

## Research Article

# Entrepreneurial leadership in early childhood education for sustainable development in South Africa

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### Article Info

Received: 16 September 2021

Revised: 26 October 2021

Accepted: 11 December 2021

Available online: 15 Dec 2021

#### Keywords:

Classroom practice

Teachers

Teaching challenges

Natural sciences

Senior phase

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### Abstract

This paper examined empirical data from research conducted in South Africa about problems induced by the global outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2021 to Entrepreneurial Leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE) for sustainable development of the sector. A desktop analysis method was employed in this paper to review the report by 'Iifa Labantwana', and Entrepreneurial Leadership in Early Childhood Education for sustainable development in South Africa during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The researchers discovered that the lengthy COVID-19 lockdown restrictions exposed gaps in government, ECE school leaders, parents and the other stakeholders' preparedness for survival, focus, continuity, and resilience in times of unexpected pandemics. The paper relied on data from the desk research, which may not have been collected from the desired setting or time. The researcher had no control over the data and may therefore only provide partial analysis in terms of precision due to lack of triangulation. The paper's findings described the importance of change in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and Entrepreneurial leaders to take risks associated with the change which requires support. The paper has theoretical implications in empowering the leaders' survival strategies in ECD centres. It further recommends new leadership directions for other leaders. The paper is an attempt to develop survival strategies during turbulent times in ECD centres and improves the level of readiness against natural disasters in developed and developing countries.

### To cite this article:

Modise, M.R. (2021). Entrepreneurial leadership in early childhood education for sustainable development in South Africa. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 9(5) Special Issue, 27-37. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17478/jegys.1010680>

## Introduction

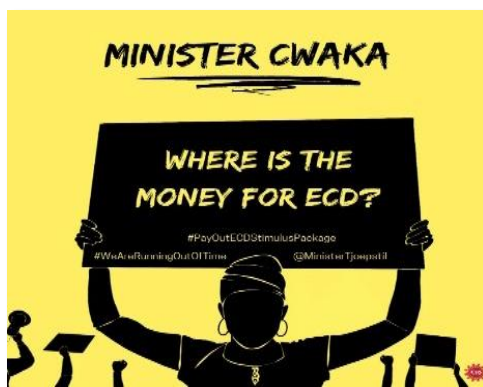
The concept entrepreneurial leadership suggests the proficiencies possessed by the leader to direct and convince followers to accomplish organizational goals that embrace guidance and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities (Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud and Brännback, 2015). In general, organisational leaders need to possess operational competencies which according to Damayanti, Hartono, and Wijaya (2021) is related to the ability to realise innovative ideas and concepts that are creative from the team into the organisation's operational system including its sustainability. If global society is serious about reaching sustainable development goals before 2030, then Entrepreneurial Leaders are among those who are going to bring about the desired change, particularly, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of COVID –19 global pandemic has drastically affected organisational operations and impacted negatively on the economic sustainability of different organisations. Among the organisations affected, the Early Childhood sector is vulnerable.

Globally, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector has been hit hard during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The first officially recognised COVID-19 case in South Africa was recorded on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2020,

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(Soudien, Reddy, and Harvey, 2021). This eventually led to the closure of schools. After the middle of April 2021, the levels of lockdown restrictions were gradually eased to level 1.

In South Africa, some early childhood centres were not able to open when COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were relaxed due to the negative impact brought by the pandemic on their financial status. A report on ‘the plight of ECE Workforce: An urgent call for relief in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic’, in April 2020 by ‘Ilifa Labantwana’ a social development wing, presented the findings to understand the impact of the closure of the ECE sector and its future sustainability. Ilifa Labantwana is a South African early childhood development programme founded in 2009. Its goal is to enable an additional 1 million children, aged zero to five, to access quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) through the Early Learning Subsidy. According to the report (Ilifa la bantwana) the majority of ECE teachers and support staff lost their monthly income as the sector was instructed to close by the Department of Social Development (DSD), which is responsible for social issues of children from birth to four years in the ECE sector. In light of the high job losses and unemployment rate triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, the office of the presidency provided ECD centres with the Early Childhood Development Employment Stimulus Relief Fund (ECDESRF) as part of sustaining employment prospects in the sector. To have access to the funds ECD centres had to apply for the funds. Not all the ECD centres managed to access the funds hence the concern by the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD). The CECD facilitates several Integrated ECD Programmes throughout South Africa by providing ECD centres with a range of support services including teacher training, equipment provision, building upgrades, governance training, and outreach programs to parents and the community” (educationinnovations.org, 2021). The CECD workforce in South Africa organised campaigns to help the ECD centres to get clarity on the presidency’s ECD Stimulus Relief Fund package that was supposed to have been paid to the ECD centres by the DSD. The placard below is an extract from the CECD website – COVID19 Resources publication mobilising the ECD centres to join forces for the campaign.



**Figure 1.**

*Campaign placard for ECD Stimulus Relief Fund (cecd.org.za, 2021)*

During the March 2020 Level 5 lockdown there were two possible ways that learning could continue taking place: self-learning or online with siblings or parental support (Soudien, Reddy and Harvey, 2021). Most parents succumbed to the pandemic which meant some children failed to pay expected fees and therefore dropped out of the ECE programme.

Some ECE leaders tried to provide online support to parents for children to continue with learning at home to maintain their (parents’) monthly payment to the centre. Facilitating stimulating activities at home put enormous stress on some parents who felt they were not teachers and were not able to facilitate such activities. According to the report, most of the ECE centres experienced payments withdrawals from parents as they felt that they could not pay for services they did not receive. Owing to these lockdown restrictions, most ECE centre operators in South Africa were unable to collect monthly payments from parents whom they mostly rely on to pay salaries and other fixed costs. It is very clear from the report that adaptive leadership behaviour was needed in response to the changing circumstances of the sector, and for ECE leaders to look at what strategies would enable them to continue operating during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the way some of the centres were run was not sustainable and needed a leadership shift. Little was mentioned about entrepreneurial leadership as one way of bringing change in the ECE sector, yet it is a strategy that could help sustain the sector. Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud and Brännback (2015) state that the entrepreneurial behaviours were increasingly important in a variety of contexts. In organizations,

these behaviours foster innovation and adaptation to changing environments. ECE centres are important organizations in any educational system and therefore need visionary leaders with innovative and creative minds.

To prolong their existence, organizations according to Mishra and Misra (2017), need to adopt innovation in their work practices to make their processes efficient and effective in future. Similarly, the leadership in the ECE sector needs to adopt ground-breaking practices for their effectiveness and future sustainability. Entrepreneurial leadership is one of the options that could be well-thought-out for future sustainability of the ECE sector. Kasim and Zakaria (2019), regard entrepreneurial leadership as a unique type of leadership required for dealing with challenges and crises of the current organizational setting such as weakening of the economy.

South Africa's economy has been weakened by the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the decision by Moody's investors' service to downgrade South Africa's long term foreign and local currency debt ratings to one notch below investment grade in 2020, Stoddard (2020) has brought some unintended consequences. Half of the population in South Africa seems to be living in excessively high level of poverty due to unemployment. The rate of unemployment has been going up almost annually. The 2018 South African Statistics revealed that 50% of the country's population lived in excessively high levels of poverty (Teffo & Tabit, 2020). The unemployment rate has been increasing almost every year (Stoddard, 2020). Many South Africans, particularly the youth, are disconnected from the formal economy through their inability to find employment. Some have sought employment in the ECE centres which offers them hope for growth and development. It is suggested that the best way to overcome slow economic growth is to create interventions that promote entrepreneurship and job creation. ECE leaderships need to strengthen their leadership skills to match that of entrepreneurship to sustain the sector. This would also help in addressing the SA National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 introduced in 2012. The SA (NDP) vision aim at reducing inequality, eliminating poverty, creating jobs, and growing an inclusive economy by 2030, National Planning Commission (2011). Therefore, the major contribution of this research was to examine the role of entrepreneurial leadership for sustainable development in early childhood sector.

### Theoretical Framework

This research was underpinned by Kurt Lewin's Change Theory (1947). Kurt Lewin's Theory is time tested and widely considered the essence of change models suitable for organizational, group and personal change (Kaminski, 2011). The process of change, according to Lewis, entails creating the perception that there is a need for change, then moving towards the new, desired level of behaviour and, finally, solidifying that new behaviour as the norm. According to Kaminski (2011), this change theory is a 'planned change' guide consisting of three stages, namely: *unfreezing*, *change process*, and *refreezing*.



**Figure 2.**

*Change Theory Stages (Adapted from Kaminski, 2011)*

*The Unfreezing Stage:* This is the stage where the need for change is realised and the desire to change takes place. Unfreezing of the current behaviour that need changes is done by reflecting upon and analysing the current behaviour. Raza (2019) firmly believes that to achieve this goal of change, all stakeholders need to be involved in the process.

*Change Process:* People involved at this stage are convinced that change in the way things were done would be the best way. New strategies and structures will then be put in place to achieve the desired change. Since change is a very complex process, Raza (2019) advises on implementing a variety of change options, examining what works and what does not work. He further mentions 'Information and Leadership' as the most important long term and effective drivers of change implementation process.

*Refreezing stage:* The third stage is that of putting processes into operational standards or procedure which is referred to as the *refreezing stage*. Failure to do this will result in people reverting to the old methods of doing things, abandoning the new processes. Raza (2019) states the purpose of the refreezing stage as that of sustaining the enacting changes. In the absence of appropriate steps that reinforce and sustain the change, the previously dominant behaviour may tend to re-assert itself.

Applying this theory to the ECE sector, leadership needs to realise the impact COVID-19 has had on the sector, accept that changes are required and develop a desire to change their circumstances. In this study, entrepreneurial leaders must know the environment in pre-COVID-19 era, during the COVID-19 period and an outlook of Post-COVID-19 era. Entrepreneurial Leaders embrace change and lean toward the power of transformation. They should not be afraid to modify their vision.

Reforms are never easy; they bring some challenges with them. Even amid a storm, when everything seems to be going wrong, they see beyond the issues, and instead of staggering in pessimism, they deviate toward possible solutions. They are innovators focusing more on new methods of advancement in areas of decision-making. They are constantly looking for ways to add to their world of expertise. The understanding of this trend enables the leaders to formulate survival strategies. Receiving counselling as leaders would ease the process of desiring to change their circumstances as they will be able to reflect on what happened, what is happening, and how best they can improve their circumstances through the support they will receive. Counselling is a way of networking.

There is need to reflect on their practices as leaders, analyse their current leadership behaviour, and consider new innovative ways of working relevant to the unprecedented circumstances they face. They need to revisit their leadership style and consider the leadership style that will be able to stand the test of time. They then must put structures and strategies in place which must be made operational standards after the buying in of all the stakeholders. The strategies should be such that they will help in sustaining the sector through offering of training, celebrating success, communication, and involvement of others.

### **The Research Significance**

The significance of this research was to bring about the alternative means that can be considered to counteract the impact of natural disaster in the ECD sector such as considering Entrepreneurial leadership for its future sustainability. The study also highlights the need for support through counselling for affected ECD personnel.

### **The Research Terms**

*Entrepreneurial Skills:* These are abilities to create something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence (Hisrich & Peter, 2002).

*Early Childhood Education (ECE):* Early childhood development is defined as a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers. (White paper 5 DoE).

*COVID-19 Pandemic:* It is a severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2, SARS-CoV-2 which harbours in human cells and results in different degrees of cellular damage and is defined as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, (Sverzellati et al. 2020).

*Leadership:* Kruse (2013), defines Leadership as ‘a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal’.

*Counselling:* It is defined as a process that might be developmental or intervening and requires counsellors focus on their clients’ goals, therefore counselling involves both choice and change, and in some cases, “counselling is a rehearsal for action” (Casey, 1996, p. 176) cited in Sheppard (2015).

*Sustainable Development:* This is the development of knowledge, skills understanding values and actions required to create a sustainable world, which ensures promotion of social equity and encourages economic sustainability.

### **Problem of Study**

Early Childhood Education plays a pivotal role in child developing activities. Prior to COVID-19 insurgence, ECE centres showed satisfactory performances and people celebrated all that. But due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, ECE operators had to halt their operations as parents suspended their monthly payments to the centres. Even though ‘Ilifa Labantwana’ had mobilised support, partnership, and resources to assist the sector to recover from the negative impact of the pandemic, ECE leaders still need to rethink how they can sustain the sector. Early childhood development is key for development and deserves funding from government and stakeholders to ensure children are well groomed. In South Africa, some ECD centres do not receive adequate funding from government as they need to meet all the requirements. The sector has been doing well but after the problems induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, it shows a predictable collapsing trend as it runs out of support from stakeholders. The prediction made it imperative that entrepreneurial leadership must act now and package dynamic survival strategies to the problems faced by the sector. This study therefore sought to explore the survival strategies implemented by Entrepreneurial Leaders.

The main aim of the study was to explore the survival strategies implemented by Entrepreneurial Leaders in ECE centres in South Africa.

- This research sought to address the following three specific study objectives:
- Determine the effectiveness of innovation and preparedness on the survival of ECE centres,
- Explore the attributes of an entrepreneur,
- Identify the role and significance of entrepreneurial leadership in an organization

Research main question central to this study was:

*What are the effects of entrepreneurial leadership in sustaining the ECE sector?*

The research was guided by the following sub questions:

- How innovative and prepared are ECE leaders to mitigate effects of natural disasters in ECE centres?
- What are the attributes of an Entrepreneurial Leader in an organization?
- What is the role and significance of the entrepreneurial leadership in an organization

## Method

### Research Model

A desktop analysis method was employed in this paper to review the report by 'Ilifa Labantwana', and Entrepreneurial Leadership in Early Childhood Education for sustainable development in South Africa during COVID -19 lockdown restrictions. This secondary research method was suitable since it involves using already existing data. The data was summarised and collated to increase the overall effectiveness of the research.

### Data Collection Tools/Documents

This study included research material published in a report on 'The plight of ECE Workforce: An urgent call for relief in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic', in April 2020 by 'Ilifa Labantwana' a social development wing. A qualitative approach was adopted in this paper to elucidate the concept of entrepreneurial leadership. A desktop analysis of literature was employed to define and explain the entrepreneurial leadership, its attributes, effects, and significance within an organization. Systematic review was employed. Reviewed literature was retrieved by using key terms of the title. Google scholar was mainly used to search for documents such as journal articles, reports and websites containing relevant information for the study. Reports, Journal articles and other gray literature related to ECD and COVID19 pandemic, Entrepreneurship, sustainable development and leadership were scanned for relevance to the research topic. Where possible most recent literature was preferred, however at some instances literature not older than 10 years was considered.

## Results

This paper examined empirical data from research conducted in South Africa about problems induced by the global outbreak of COVID -19 pandemic from 2019 to 2021 on Entrepreneurial Leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE) for sustainable development of the sector. To answer the research question, a review of literature focusing on definition of leadership, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial leadership, attributes of entrepreneurship, its effect, conceptualization of entrepreneurial leadership in ECE, and the role of counselling was undertaken. Implications for policy and practice were also examined. The following literature review is an overview published works on the topic under study.

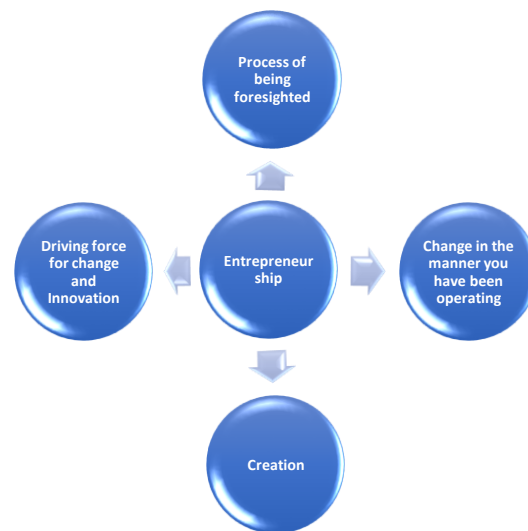
### Theme 1. Elucidating the Concept of Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Consistent with the relational and entrepreneurial leadership literature, Douglas (2017) defines leadership as a process of influencing positive change to achieve a desired goal or generate a new solution to a problem. Leadership in ECE according to Hujala and Eskelinen (2013), is a holistic process that involves not only the leader and the administration but also personnel and indirectly parents and everyone else who has an influence on ECE practice. Furthermore, Stamopoulos (2012) reframes leadership as a shared responsibility amongst tertiary educational institutions, professional organizations, all professionals, and those who work with young children and their families. Douglas (2017) further delineates leadership as a process of influencing change to improve early care and education, which is not reserved just for those with formal leadership positions. In summary, leadership is the involvement and participation of all ECE stakeholders with the purpose of meeting the sector's goals to meet the needs of children.

### Theme 2. Concept of Entrepreneurship

A lot is being said these days about people becoming 'entrepreneurs'. Entrepreneurship is a key factor for the survival of ECD centres in an ever-changing and increasingly complex global economy. But what is entrepreneurship? Kuratko

and Hodgetts (2007) define entrepreneurship as a dynamic process of vision, change and creation, while Yemini, Addi-Racah and Katarivas (2014) consider it to be a driving force of change and innovation that introduces opportunities to achieve efficient and effective performance in both public and private sectors. There are two parts to entrepreneurship. The first is the managerial skills needed to run a profitable business. The second is 'entrepreneurial spirit'. Both are important. According to Kuratko and Hodgetts (2007), entrepreneurship requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. York and Sarasvathy (2010), postulates that innovation in an education field would be related to school practices, standards, and policies with immediate impact at the classroom level. Figure below present visual description of the concept entrepreneurship with graphic visualisation.



**Figure 2.**

*Entrepreneurship Concept (Researcher's own design)*

#### *ECE and Sustainable Development*

Sustainable development according to Slimane (2012) is the process of developing land, cities, and communities as well as business, if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) met to discuss and develop a set of goals to work towards. The goals grew out of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that claimed success in reducing global poverty while acknowledging that there was still much more to do. The Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG) eventually came up with a list of 17 items which included amongst other things: the end of poverty and hunger, sustainable economic growth while promoting jobs and stronger economies and sustainability to include health of the land, air, and sea. Early childhood interventions, which target children directly and aim to improve their developmental outcomes is one of the approaches that attempt to mitigate poverty's negative influence on children (Magnuson, 2013). For the ECE sector to consider strengthening their entrepreneurial prowess through adaptation of entrepreneurial leadership they might meet some of the millennium goals.

#### *Evolving Definitions of Entrepreneurial Leadership*

Entrepreneurial leadership is said to be the kind of leadership role performed in entrepreneurial ventures, rather than in the more general sense of an entrepreneurial style of leadership (Leitch, McMullan & Harrison, 2013). According to Renko et al. (2015) it entails influencing and directing the performance of group members toward the achievement of organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities. Kasim and Zakaria (2019) sees an entrepreneurial leader as a leader who is classified to achieve the same goal by using entrepreneurial behaviour. Through the adoption of entrepreneurial leadership, the ECE leaders will be able to influence the stakeholders towards the achievements of organizational goals through the change that will be put in place.

#### *Attributes of Entrepreneurial Leadership*

An important part of being an entrepreneurial leader involves recognizing new opportunities and securing resources for exploitation of the opportunities (Renko et al. 2015). The tasks of the ECE leader (principal) are that of planning and implementing an entrepreneurship development and evaluation program. A school principal according to Yulindrasari, Adriany and Rahmawati (2019), is an educator who must be transformative as he deals with human resource, this should be the same with the ECE leaders. On the surface, one can associate entrepreneurs with

leadership functions such as providing vision to the development of a new product, service, or organization (Fernald, Solomon, & Tarabishy, 2005).

An entrepreneur should have focus and should be able to concentrate with dedication on stated goals, and should not lose sight of critical issues. Success is not possible without the ability to practise sustained concentration on a task in a single direction. For example, Strive Masiyiwa of the leading telecommunications business started as a small business but through dedication and focus he did not lose hope. Dedication motivates the entrepreneur to work hard, plan and generate ideas.

#### *Effect of Entrepreneurial Leadership within an Organization*

One of the key drivers towards a need for a more entrepreneurial style of leadership is that the quality of teaching and learning needs to be such that it creates a 'citizenry with a capacity to compete successfully in the global village' (Scott & Webber, 2013). The requirement to quickly modify organizational structures and processes as a corporation pivots in search of a better business model or swings toward growth necessitates leadership behaviors that can address a wide range of paradoxes and tensions (Volery, Mueller & von Siemens, 2015). Entrepreneurial leadership, as a distinctive type of leadership required for dealing with challenges and crises of current organizational settings, has increasingly been applied to improve school performance. However, there is limited research on the impact of school leaders' entrepreneurial leadership practices on school innovativeness (Pihie, Asuimiran & Bagheri, 2014).

In complex and volatile environments, some traditional approaches to strategy may become increasingly ineffective, necessitating an entrepreneurial approach (Rahim, Zainal, Mohtar & Ramli, 2015). Organizations must be more entrepreneurial to enhance their performance, their capacity for adaptation and long-term survival. It is therefore key for ECE leaders to know the significance of shifting to or renewing their entrepreneurial leadership skills.

#### *The Significance of Entrepreneurial Leadership*

For the ECE sector to keep up with the unexpected changes and national disasters it needs leaders who are creative. The concept of creativity in education is characterised by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena and to generate solutions. Creativity is the catalyst for all new innovations. Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality or the generation of ideas that result in the improved efficiency or effectiveness of a system. This is supported by

Guberina, and Wang (2021) state that Entrepreneurial leadership style aims to induce creative and innovative thinking and development of well-thought delicate strategies to utilize resources available and sustain employee resilience in the face of adversity.

#### *Risk Taking Strategy*

Leaders should be forward thinking, proactive, not afraid to take risks. Risk taking strategy is an important aspect of running an organisation. It is the tendency to take bold actions rather than being cautious thus 'venturing into the unknown'. Risk taking is defined as a calculated behaviour displayed by organisations based on their analysis to target growth and this calls for decisions involving substantial financial and human resource investment (Basu & Gupta, 2013) this spirit of creativity and rule breaking through riskiness can become critical inputs in leveraging organisational growth. Risk taking and the way it impacts on the survival of an institution operations represent critical issues in strategic management. Sozuer et al. (2017) viewed the managers' tendency to deal with the altering business surroundings prerequisites with the aid of taking incredible choices related to directing the organization's assets toward exploiting possibilities with uncertain results.

#### *Innovation Strategy*

This is another aspect for business survival. It is considered to be a critical element of entrepreneurship. The Stone Age did not end because people had run out of stones but it failed to grow because it was overtaken by changes in the environment and people's mind-sets. Innovation is key to improving the social, economic and the environmental performance of the ECD sector. Innovation is changing your business model and adapting to changes in the environment to deliver better services (Hana, 2013). The inventive part of innovation is based on people's knowledge, skills, and experience. For the innovation strategy to work, the aspect of human factor is an indispensable element as people generate ideas that might help the organisation to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors. According to Shepherd and Wiklund (2020), innovation indicated the companies' activity towards adopting new thoughts to acquire an aggressive advantage, whilst Haider et al. (2017) regarded it as a business chain aimed at providing new

offerings and products or growing commercial enterprise mannequin that assist to cope with threats and seizing new possibilities that enhance the business enterprise.

### Resilience

This stems from the Latin *resilire*, denoting the idea of ‘bouncing back’, that is rebounding or recoiling (Alexander, 2013). The concept of resilience is used in addressing complex issues such as COVID-19. It also has great influence on leaders’ competency in recognizing new opportunities to improve the organization’s performance (Soane, Butler & Stanton, 2015). Entrepreneurial leadership is leadership for innovation that seeks out new, better, and more adaptive solutions to complex problems (Douglas, 2018).

As another means of support, the DSD, through ‘Iifa la bantwana’, has offered all eligible ECE services to apply to the Employment Stimulus Relief Fund. The challenge was the accessibility for ECE services that are in rural areas and struggle with network connectivity. This is a good gesture by government, but it is important that forums could be created where the ECE leaders are offered opportunities to speak about their good and bad experiences and be offered support through counselling sessions.

## Conclusion

The research question investigated in this research paper is ‘What are the effects of entrepreneurial leadership in sustaining the ECE sector?’ Constructed on this research question, the results from the reviewed literature are presented in the following sequences; elucidation of key term, findings on leadership attribute, the significance of leadership in organisations and the type of support needed to be provided to ECCM to recover from the effects of the COVID-19.

Responding to the first objective which aimed at elucidating the terms ‘early childhood leadership and entrepreneurship’ as the main key terms of the research, the following were the findings: leadership in early childhood was found to be a shared responsibility between all the ECCE stakeholders. The findings revealed that leadership is a process that influences positive change within an organisation for it to achieve a desired goal. It was further found to be a driving force that led to change and innovation. Entrepreneurship as the key term was found to be a dynamic process.

In responding to the second objective which intended to explore the attributes of an entrepreneur of an organization, there are two parts to entrepreneurship. The first is the managerial skills needed to run a profitable business, the second is ‘entrepreneurial spirit’. Both are important. According to Kuratko and Hodgetts (2007), entrepreneurship requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. According to York and Sarasvathy (2010), innovation in an education field would be related to school practices, standards, and policies with immediate impact on the classroom activities.

Entrepreneurial leadership plays a critical role in any organisation’s operations and survival, more so in turbulent environments. Entrepreneurial leaders need to ensure innovation both internally and externally to ensure its sustainability amidst all forms of uncertainties. The Early childhood sector may survive if the leaders could offer the best curriculum that is implemented in the least number of resources. This requires change in the leadership styles of the ECCMs.

The findings further suggest that entrepreneurial leadership is of value to the ECE sector for its future sustainability and financial improvement. Entrepreneurial leadership develops the individual’s way of thinking, functional competences, cultivates a set of change and equips people with a set of concrete strategies to implement the improvements (Pihie, Asimiran & Bageheri, 2014).

Theories of change and survival strategies have an enormous influence on understanding of Entrepreneurial Leadership. Kurt Lewin’s theory suggests a process of individual and organizational change in turbulent environments such as that posed by COVID-19. The theory has a bearing on the survival of organisations such as ECD centres. This paper envisages an ECE sector that is more entrepreneurial and that enhances leaders’ capacity for adaptation, long term survival and performance. The paper demonstrated the relevance of entrepreneurial leadership in sustaining and bringing economic independence to the ECE sector. It also demonstrated how entrepreneurial leadership can bring financial growth to the sector and create sustainable jobs. ECE leaders need to appropriately sharpen their entrepreneurial skills and use them to improve and sustain the economic state of their centres

## Recommendations

An organisation cannot survive if it does not renew or reengineer itself. Kurt Lewin’s Theory stressed the importance of change in organisations. Similarly, if leadership does not go where the wind of change takes them, they will become



stagnant. Change is uncomfortable but it marks the time to change. Entrepreneurial leaders should be constantly improving, looking for better ways of operating ECD centres. These are specific leadership implications attached to Kurt Lewin's theory. The outcomes of the exploration reported in this paper have important implications for policy and practice.

*The Implications are:*

Entrepreneurial leaders must see the benefit of change, which requires coaching, support, patience, and counselling. Change in ECD centres improves teaching practices. Flexibility is a trait for survival and in teaching it plays an important role in understanding the importance of change and implementing it in teaching practices.

Change makes leaders and teachers address children's needs effectively as they are the beneficiaries of school. This implies that children's needs come before anything else. Leaders should realise that children change constantly, and their needs also change day by day. Hence, pedagogical methods need to evolve to encourage them to become global citizens.

Entrepreneurial leaders should take risks associated with change. Teachers also need to be motivated and encouraged to use modern teaching methods. ECD teachers' efforts to change and take risks in turbulent times must be recognised and rewarded. Change will only occur when those who work in schools can develop new knowledge and skills, hence professional development becomes critical.

*The Recommendations are:*

Education in COVID-19 pandemic has been an issue the international community is grappling with. The challenge has been exacerbated by say cyclones, other health disasters, among other things pandemics. COVID-19 in South Africa, has worsened woes to a dire economy, which was on unprecedented decline. Based on this observation, the following recommendations are proffered:

*Policy*

Registrations of ECE centres with the Government Departments should require leaders or directors who have entrepreneurial skills, through training. This will also be ascertained through the submission of a feasible business plan upon registration of the centre. It should be compulsory for the ECE sector to implement the entrepreneurship business model for running their centres and present their business plan on registration at the DSD, monitoring its implementation and providing support. A business model importance is in 'defining how the enterprise delivers value to customers, entices customers to pay for value, and converts those payments to profit. It thus reflects management's hypothesis about what customers want, how they want it, and how the enterprise can organize to best meet those needs, get paid for doing so, and make a profit'.

Government is encouraged to increase support it giving to ECDs centres to help them mitigate perennial problems in the education sector. Any programme to be successful it needs the support at the highest level. It should be considered a policy that organizations and group of individuals who have experienced natural disasters be supported by government through provision of counselling to heal from the experience and to be offered an opportunity to talk about their experiences.

*Practice*

ECE leaders need to change their leadership behaviours to a new way of running the centres and be prepared to adjust to the circumstances brought about by change. According to Renko et.al (2015) the change environment of ECE requires:

- Intervention programmes that promote entrepreneurship and job creation to overcome slow economic growth.
- Leaders who search for opportunities, may start projects, collect, and strive to manage the resources needed. Leaders should find human resource, determine goals for the organization, guide and lead the personnel to achieve organizational goals.
- The ECE leadership may look at different ways of improving their entrepreneurial skills to create additional income and sustain the sector. They may also look at how they can improve their programmes to attract more children as well as incorporating programmes that will provide young people with more opportunities of job creation, thus empowering the community. They may introduce programmes and make them available to communities to help with job creation and at the same time bring income for the centre. Overall, leaders should develop the right focus, create the right environment, and build the right team.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research was limited only to the ECE sector using Desktop analysis as a method of data collection. Literature on how entrepreneurial leadership can be adopted for sustainable development in the ECE sector was reviewed. The reviewed literature was limited to “Ilifa la bantwana report on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. A major limitation of using desk research is that it may not answer sufficiently the researcher’s specific research questions or contain specific data that the researcher requires in the study.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the people close to me, my family, colleagues, my eldest son Moatlhodi Letsholo Modise, and my editors, without their generous support, the completion of this paper would not have been possible. Furthermore, I would like to thank Almighty God for giving me strength to work on the paper.

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