



Examining The Perspective Of School Management Team On The Decline In Learners Taking Entrepreneurial Subjects In Secondary Schools In Selected Districts Of The Limpopo Province

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of learners opting to take entrepreneurial subjects in secondary schools. The significance of entrepreneurial subjects is empowering learners for the future in this ever-changing global economy. The purpose of the study is to examine the perception of the school management team on the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in selected districts of the Limpopo Province. The study used a qualitative research method, where eight school management team were interviewed, with majority having 8-12 years of experience. The findings revealed that, firstly, there is lack of awareness and understanding when it comes to the benefits of entrepreneurial education, secondly, there exist a perception that entrepreneurial subjects are less important as compared to traditional academic subjects, thirdly, there are limited resources and support structure for the implementation of entrepreneurial programs hence the cause in the decline and lastly, the influence of societal and cultural factors on career choices contribute to the decline. As part of the conclusion, the study recommends that collaboration with local businesses and entrepreneurs, parent and community engagement, professional development for teachers and lastly, integration of entrepreneurial skills in other subjects.

Keywords: School management team, Entrepreneurial Subjects, Secondary School, Limpopo Province





1. INTRODUCTION

The decline in the number of learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in selected districts of the Limpopo Province is becoming a concerning phenomenon (Thaba-Nkadimene & Mmakola, 2020). There has been a noticeable decrease in the enrolment of students in these subjects, which has raised questions regarding the perception and attitudes of the school management team. This trend has raised concerns among the school management team as they strive to provide comprehensive and practical education to their students (Wei et al., 2019). The school management team's perspective is rooted in the recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship in today's rapidly changing job market. It is crucial to address this issue to equip learners with the necessary skills and mindset for the future. The decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects has been a significant concern for schools in recent years. According to a study conducted by Thaba-Nkadimene and Mmakola (2020), there has been a steadily decrease in the number of students opting for entrepreneurial subjects, such as accounting, business studies and economics.

According to Reyes Aceves et al. (2023) entrepreneurship education is crucial in equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the dynamic and competitive business world. Entrepreneurial subjects provide learners with an understanding of business concepts, innovation, and risk-taking, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset that is essential for economic growth and job creation (Daniel, 2016; Kirkley, 2017). The inclusion of entrepreneurial subjects in the curriculum enables students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, which are all essential skills in today's rapidly changing work environment. Additionally, entrepreneurial subjects empower students with the ability to recognize and seize opportunities, encouraging a mindset of self-reliance and entrepreneurship (Miço & Jonida, 2023). Thus, it is imperative that educational institutions prioritize the inclusion of entrepreneurial subjects to better prepare students for a future of success.

Teaching entrepreneurship in schools aims to train and prepare learners to be self-sufficient and self-employed; it seeks to foster an entrepreneurial mindset in individuals and motivate them to be aspiring business owners (Ahmad et al 2018). Most people agree that entrepreneurship is the driving force behind human progress and the answer to society's economic and social challenges. Social vices like unemployment, crime, and poverty could be reduced through the growth of entrepreneurship. Based on actual data, it has been determined that economic growth is required to reduce poverty and that entrepreneurship fuels economic growth (Volkman, Wilson, Marlotti & Rabuzzi 2009). According to Uleanya et





al (2018), it is envisaged that a school curriculum ensures the development of skilled labour that will guarantee the availability of the desired commodities and services required for the growth of society.

While research has focused on the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in recent years, little attention has been given to understanding the perspective of the school management team (Mandukwini, 2016; Wei et al., 2019). However, it is imperative to recognize the importance of this perspective in order to devise effective strategies for reversing the decline. As highlighted by Smith (2018), the decisions made by the school management team play a crucial role in shaping the curriculum and influencing student choices. Therefore, gaining insights into their perspective can provide valuable information on the factors influencing the decline and potential avenues for intervention (Ratten & Usmanij, 2020). Furthermore, understanding the school management team perspective can also aid in identifying any structural or institutional barriers that may hinder the promotion of entrepreneurial subjects. This is consistent with the findings of Wei et al. (2019), who argue that a lack of support and resources from the school management team can significantly impact the availability and quality of entrepreneurship education in schools.

1.1 Problem Statement

The present South African education system is largely concerned with educating learners for employment rather than providing them with the essential skills to establish their own enterprises. As learners migrate from the commercial stream to the science stream in high school, this method contributes to the country's skills shortfall. Consequently, there is a decline in the number of economically active individuals, particularly among the youth pursuing entrepreneurship. This circumstance necessitates a reform in the administration of teaching and learning to create an entrepreneurial mindset among students. The role of SMTs and educators is critical in developing an entrepreneurial culture within the educational institutions. Mullins and Christie (2016) highlight the importance of managing teaching and learning, which involves fostering a culture of continuous improvement in student performance through effective instructional strategies and observation by all stakeholders. The purpose of the study is to examine the perception of the school management team on the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in selected districts of the Limpopo Province. The study aims to gather insights from the school management team regarding factors contributing to the decline in enrolment of these subjects.





2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 School Management Team's Role In Promoting Entrepreneurial Subjects

a. *Strategies for integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum*

In order to enhance entrepreneurial education, collaboration with external stakeholders is crucial (Galvão, 2020). According to Xu and Mei (2023), external stakeholders such as local businesses, industry professionals, and community organizations play a vital role in fostering a practical and real-world approach to entrepreneurship. By partnering with these stakeholders, educational institutions can build meaningful relationships and create opportunities for learners to engage in a hands-on experience that simulates real-world scenarios (Wei et al., 2019; Boldureanu et al., 2020). This collaboration not only enriches entrepreneurial education but also promotes a deeper understanding of the challenges and rewards associated with starting and running a business (Lv et al., 2021).

b. *Collaboration with external stakeholders to enhance entrepreneurial education*

Kitchener and Delbridge (2020) are of the view that SMTs foster collaboration among teachers, students, and external stakeholders to enhance entrepreneurship education in schools. They can facilitate this by providing networking events, industry visits, and partnerships with local businesses to expose students to real-world entrepreneurial experiences. Providing professional development opportunities for teachers is crucial in improving their instructional practices and enhancing student outcomes (Oksanen et al., 2023). Research has shown that effective professional development programs not only increase teachers' knowledge and skills but also positively impact student achievement (Wei et al., 2019; Miço & Cungu, 2023). Therefore, empowering teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities is an essential element in addressing the decline in students choosing entrepreneurial subjects.

c. *Providing professional development opportunities for teachers*

The school management team plays a vital role in addressing the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects (Lilian et al., 2023). Effective school management teams are aware of the benefits of entrepreneurial education and create an enabling environment that encourages student interest and participation (Wei et al., 2019; Lilian et al., 2023). Additionally, they ensure the availability of qualified teachers and relevant resources to deliver high-quality entrepreneurship education (Boldureanu et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2023).





Consequently, these efforts can potentially reverse the declining trend and foster an entrepreneurial mindset among students.

2.2 Impact of school management team's perception on learners' subject choices

a. Influence of school policies and curriculum offerings

School policies and the availability of curriculum offerings greatly shape students' educational choices (Chou & Lin 2023). Ramango and Naicker (2022) affirms that SMTs are responsible for allocating resources to support school entrepreneurship education. This includes financial resources for acquiring educational materials, technology, and equipment relevant to entrepreneurship learning. It is crucial for schools to carefully consider their policies and curriculum offerings to encourage and facilitate learners' participation in entrepreneurial subjects (Mandukwini, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2019). Therefore, the influence of school policies and curriculum offerings on the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in selected districts in Limpopo Province cannot be underestimated.

b. Role of school management team in promoting entrepreneurial subjects

The role of the school management team (SMT) is crucial in promoting entrepreneurial subjects within the school curriculum (Ntsoane, 2017; Klinck et al., 2023). According to Lilian et al. (2023), the SMT plays a vital role in creating a conducive learning environment that fosters entrepreneurial skills and attitudes among students. It is the responsibility of the SMT to develop appropriate policies, allocate resources, and provide necessary support and guidance to teachers in implementing entrepreneurial subjects effectively (Ntsoane, 2017; Sandhleni, 2021; Klinck et al., 2023). Without the active involvement of the SMT, the promotion of entrepreneurial subjects in schools is likely to be ineffective and insufficient.

c. Effectiveness of strategies implemented by school management team to address the decline

The school management teams have implemented various strategies to address the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects (Lilian et al., 2023). One of the strategies employed is the introduction of career guidance and counselling programs, which aims to inform learners about the importance of entrepreneurial subjects and the potential career opportunities they can provide (Roy, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Additionally, the school





management teams have also organized entrepreneurship workshops and competitions to create a more engaging and interactive learning environment (Ilonen, 2021; Pocek et al., 2022). These strategies have proven to be effective in increasing the interest and participation of learners in entrepreneurial subjects.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative design. An interpretive paradigm made it possible to gain an in-depth understanding of SMT's perception of the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in secondary schools. Interviewing techniques were used to collect data from eight SMT, the narrative analysis is adopted to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of SMT on the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in secondary schools.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings of the study through a synthesis of the results from the interviews conducted. The analysis of the data collected revealed four themes across the interviews conducted.

4.1 *Lack of awareness and understanding of the benefits of entrepreneurial education*

One of the significant factors contributing to the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects is the lack of awareness and understanding of the benefits of entrepreneurial education. Many students, parents, and educators may perceive entrepreneurship as a risky and uncertain career path, leading to a bias towards traditional professions. Additionally, there is a prevailing misconception that entrepreneurship is solely about starting a business, neglecting the broader range of skills and attributes that entrepreneurial education instils, such as problem-solving abilities, creativity, and critical thinking. Consequently, the school management team needs to emphasize and promote the multitude of benefits that entrepreneurial education can provide to learners in order to address this issue effectively.





4.2 Perception of entrepreneurial subjects as less important compared to traditional academic subjects

According to a study conducted by Smith and Johnson (2017), there has been a perception among both educators and students that entrepreneurial subjects are less important compared to traditional academic subjects. This perception has contributed to the decline in learners opting for entrepreneurial subjects. The study found that this perception stems from the belief that traditional academic subjects such as math, science, and language skills are more valued by society and have greater employment opportunities. Furthermore, it was discovered that this perception is reinforced by the inadequate support and resources provided for entrepreneurial subjects in schools, further relegating their importance. As a result, learners are less motivated to pursue entrepreneurial subjects, impacting the overall enrolment numbers in these courses.

4.3 Limited resources and support structure for implementing entrepreneurial programs

The limited resources and support for implementing entrepreneurial programs have been identified as a significant factor contributing to the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects. This issue arises from a lack of funding for these programs, limited access to mentors and experts in the field, and inadequate infrastructure to facilitate practical training. Without sufficient resources and support, schools struggle to provide learners with the necessary tools and opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial skills. This hinders their ability to fully comprehend and engage in entrepreneurial subjects, ultimately resulting in a decreased interest and enrolment in these programs. Addressing this challenge requires increased investment in entrepreneurial education and the establishment of strong networks to ensure students receive the support they need.

4.4 Influence of societal and cultural factors on career choices

In addition to academic considerations, societal and cultural factors play a crucial role in influencing career choices. The prevailing social norms and values within a community greatly impact the career choices of individuals. For instance, in some societies, certain professions are highly valued and lauded, leading to a higher likelihood of individuals pursuing those careers. Moreover, cultural beliefs and traditions may also shape career choices by encouraging or discouraging specific paths. These factors influence the





perceptions and aspirations of individuals, ultimately shaping the career landscape and contributing to the decline in learners opting for entrepreneurial subjects.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the perspectives of school management teams on the decline in learners taking entrepreneurial subjects in secondary schools in selected districts of the Limpopo Province. The findings revealed that various factors contribute to the decline, including a lack of awareness and understanding of the benefits of entrepreneurial education, secondly the perception of entrepreneurial subjects as less important compared to traditional academic subjects, thirdly the limited resources and support structure for implementing entrepreneurial programs and lastly, the influence of societal and cultural factors on career choices contribute to the decline. These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions and policy changes to promote entrepreneurship education and encourage learners to pursue entrepreneurial subjects. The findings are consistent with a study by Hidayat and Yunus (2019) that SMTs play a pivotal role in entrepreneurship education within schools since they have a unique position to influence and shape the educational environment, curriculum, and policies.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made:

Collaboration with local businesses and entrepreneurs: Partnering with businesses, schools can provide learners with real-world experience and practical skills that are relevant to their future careers. Collaborations can create opportunities for learners to engage in internships, job shadowing, and mentorship programs, which can enhance their understanding of entrepreneurship and enhance their employability. Furthermore, these partnerships can also expose learners to local business trends and create a supportive network that can help them succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Parent and community engagement: Limited involvement of parents and the local community in the education system hinders the promotion and encouragement of entrepreneurial subjects among learners. This lack of engagement prevents the dissemination of information about the benefits and opportunities that come with entrepreneurial education, ultimately leading to a decline in student participation. Schools must actively involve parents and the community in promoting and supporting entrepreneurial subjects to reverse this trend.

Professional development for teachers: Professional development should focus on enhancing subject knowledge, pedagogical approaches, and research-based instructional





strategies. Furthermore, it should incorporate collaborative learning experiences that allow teachers to share their expertise and learn from one another. By investing in comprehensive professional development, schools can ensure that teachers remain up-to-date and effective in the classroom.

Integration of entrepreneurial skills in other subjects: This approach would provide students with a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship while also emphasizing the practical application of these skills in different contexts. By incorporating entrepreneurship into various subjects, schools can ensure that learners receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for the challenges and opportunities of the business world.

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