



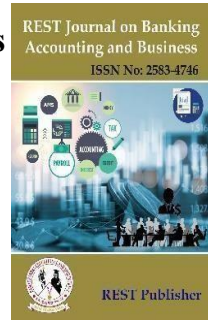
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Resilience And Innovation in Preschool Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of a Woman Entrepreneur

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Abstract: Although many Indian women are aspiring to start a business, they often find it harder to succeed. In fact, India has been found in a group of countries where female business owners (as well as female leaders and professionals) are struggling with unfavorable conditions, obvious cultural biases, and lack of financial, capital, training and other business resources. The research on women's entrepreneurship has made great progress, and a wide range of consensus has been obtained in the academic world. In manufacturing, food and beverage, healthcare, agriculture, biomedicine, banking, beauty and lifestyle, entertainment and other industries, women are surpassing their male peers, and the kindergarten industry is witnessing an influx of female entrepreneurs. The influx of women entrepreneurs in this field can be attributed to the innovative methods of early development of learning solutions, which aim to standardize the largely unstructured preschool space. This study is about the efforts put forward by a woman entrepreneur, who integrated creative and pedagogical innovations in her own pre-school, Cherries Montessori School, Mavelikara. Survey method was adopted for the study. Structured interviews with the woman entrepreneur and the parents of the children studying in the preschool were conducted. About 50 parents of the children studying in the preschool since 2014 were selected as the sample. A questionnaire was also provided to the entrepreneur to get an idea about the startup, financial plan, capital requirements and challenges she faced during the starting up of preschool. The investigator conducted participant observation so as to study about the innovative strategies followed in the preschool as well as the effectiveness of the strategies. A Differential skills test on different skills was conducted by the investigator to assess academic as well as social skills among the preschool children. About 72 students studying in the institution from 4 to 6 years of age were selected to conduct the test. The data collected was analyzed qualitatively. This pre – school was initiated as one which is swimming against the tide. Initially she faced a lot of challenges like financial burden, inability to build a supporting network and heavy competition in the field of education. This is an institution with a difference that aims at ameliorating the deviant behaviors, learning disability, social skill problems and attention problems among pre – schoolers thereby enhancing their life skills, social skills and achievement. The content and organization of the program is planned based on different criteria like practical to implement, appealing to children develops creativity and other skills. It was found that a child who completes three years of pre – school (from 3 to 6 years) from Cherries Montessori School will be self-disciplined, creative, socially responsible, autonomous, confident, and competent and moreover is ready to face life.

Keywords: Resilience, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Woman Entrepreneur

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a powerful driver of economic development, educational innovation, and social transformation. Within the education sector, preschool entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant avenue for enhancing the quality, accessibility, and diversity of early childhood education services. The preschool industry has experienced substantial growth in recent years due to increasing parental awareness of the importance of early childhood education, changing family structures, urbanization, and supportive government

initiatives. Despite these opportunities, establishing and sustaining a preschool enterprise remains a complex endeavor that demands visionary leadership, sound managerial competence, financial planning, and continuous innovation. For women entrepreneurs, these challenges are often compounded by gender stereotypes, limited access to financial resources, work–family balance issues, and societal expectations. Nevertheless, many women have successfully transformed these obstacles into opportunities by demonstrating resilience, creativity, and entrepreneurial leadership. Their ability to adapt to changing educational demands, integrate innovative teaching practices, and maintain sustainable institutions illustrates the critical role of resilience and innovation in ensuring long-term organizational success. Examining the experiences of women entrepreneurs in the preschool sector therefore provides valuable insights into the intersection of gender, education, and entrepreneurship while highlighting the strategies that enable women-led educational enterprises to thrive in a competitive and dynamic environment. Resilience and innovation have become indispensable attributes for educational entrepreneurs, particularly in the wake of rapid technological advancements, evolving parental expectations, increased competition, and disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience enables entrepreneurs to cope with uncertainty, recover from setbacks, and sustain organizational growth, whereas innovation facilitates the adoption of new pedagogical approaches, digital technologies, effective leadership practices, and child-centered learning environments. In the preschool context, innovation extends beyond curriculum design to encompass institutional management, stakeholder engagement, teacher development, inclusive educational practices, and the integration of technology into early childhood learning. Understanding how women entrepreneurs cultivate these capabilities offers important theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of entrepreneurship, educational leadership, and early childhood education. Using an in-depth case study approach, the present research explores the entrepreneurial journey of a woman preschool entrepreneur, focusing on the challenges encountered, the resilience demonstrated in overcoming barriers, and the innovative strategies employed to establish and sustain a successful preschool enterprise. The study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on women entrepreneurship by illustrating how resilience and innovation interact to shape entrepreneurial success in the preschool education sector and by generating insights that may inform aspiring entrepreneurs, educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in fostering sustainable and inclusive educational enterprises. The Indian economy has grown steadily over the past decade, and the number of start-ups and new businesses in the country has also surged. Most of them were founded by men. Although many Indian women are aspiring to start a business, they often find it harder to succeed. In fact, India has been found in a group of countries where female business owners (as well as female leaders and professionals) are struggling with unfavorable conditions, obvious cultural biases, and lack of financial, capital, training and other business resources. The research on women's entrepreneurship has made great progress, and a wide range of consensus has been obtained in the academic world. The most important thing is to help understand all the factors that explain the difficulties of women's entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs represent the fastest growing category of entrepreneurs in the world, especially in recent years, they have attracted the attention of many scholars. According to emerging literature, women can make significant contributions to entrepreneurial activities (Noguera et al., 2013) and economic development (Kelley et al., 2017; Hechevarría et al., 2019) in creating new jobs and increasing employment. Gross domestic product (GDP) (Bahmani-Oskooee et al., 2013; Ayogu and Agu, 2015), has a positive impact on poverty reduction and social exclusion (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Rae, 2015). However, the proportion of women who decide to pursue entrepreneurial careers is lower than that of men (Elam et al., 2019), and as the country's development level increases, the difference will be even greater (Coduras and Autotio, 2013). According to the Ministry of Statistics and Planning and Implementation In the sixth economic census released, women accounted for about 14% of the total number of Indian entrepreneurs, or 8.05 million out of 58.5 million entrepreneurs. Since ancient times, women have always been the backbone of the family, shouldering multiple responsibilities and taking care of family life and career. Their parenting and understanding nature instinctively make them better at parenting. In fact, it is the role of mother who helps women develop business-related skills, thus opening up the path to entrepreneurship. This study is about the efforts put forward by a woman entrepreneur, who integrated creative and pedagogical innovations in her own preschool. The preschool was initiated as the one which is swimming against the tide. It is an institution with a difference that aimed at ameliorating the deviant behaviors, learning disability, social skills problems among preschoolers.

2. FEATURES OF CHERRIES MONTESSORI SCHOOL

This school is situated in the outskirts of Mavelikara Taluk in Alappuzha district, Kerala. It is easily accessible for the children. A single teacher teaches about 80 children a year where the children belong to different ages from 3 to 6 years. The children are categorized into three categories Babies, Juniors and Seniors depending on their age. The

school has a good ambience and conducive atmosphere appropriate for the tiny tots. The main ethos of the school is to provide the highest quality of preschool education, safe & loving environment, curriculum based on fundamentals of 3Es. Enquire, Explore & Experiment. Learning experiences are primarily provided through music, art, drama, dance, puppet shows, activities, presenting stories and rhymes using smart boards, exercise on practical life, sensorial activities, activities to refine different types of senses, literacy materials. Working models and other enrichment programmes like cooking, visual arts etc. Every year a Young Wizard Show is organised in the school to enable the children to learn on different topics like animal kingdom, plant kingdom, spices, medicinal plants etc. and present it in front of an audience with a story board. Moreover, the competitions include variety and innovation. It includes Endurance competition, balancing on one foot, Role plays etc. Books are not provided, instead different worksheets on different subjects and skills prepared by the teacher are provided to the children. All the worksheets are tied together to a file which will be given to the children only during the weekends. The teacher tries to make sure that every kid gets the necessary amount of protein and calories every day. Cultural programmes are specially designed to inculcate character, values and behavioral etiquettes that help the kids to be respectful & responsible individuals. Monthly progress reports in terms of rubrics prepared by the teacher will provide a clear understanding about the progress of the child.

3. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The preschool education sector plays a crucial role in shaping children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, making effective entrepreneurial leadership essential for delivering high-quality early childhood education. Despite the increasing participation of women in educational entrepreneurship, they continue to encounter numerous challenges, including financial constraints, gender stereotypes, regulatory complexities, work-life balance issues, and rapidly evolving educational demands. Understanding how women entrepreneurs successfully overcome these challenges through resilience and innovation is therefore of significant academic and practical importance. This case study provides valuable insights into the strategies adopted by a woman entrepreneur to establish, manage, and sustain a successful preschool enterprise while maintaining educational excellence and organizational growth. The findings contribute to the existing literature on women's entrepreneurship, educational leadership, and early childhood education by highlighting best practices in innovation, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, and institutional management. Furthermore, the study offers useful implications for aspiring women entrepreneurs, educators, policymakers, and researchers by demonstrating how resilience and innovative leadership can foster sustainable educational enterprises and improve the quality of preschool education in an increasingly competitive environment.

Objectives:

- To understand the steps undertaken by the woman entrepreneur to start the preschool at home
- To identify the factors that compelled the woman entrepreneur to start the preschool
- To study about the challenges encountered by the woman entrepreneur while starting the preschool
- To investigate the resilience strategies employed by the woman entrepreneur in the development and management of a preschool enterprise.
- To identify the innovations adopted by the woman entrepreneur in the preschool
- To find out the effectiveness of the innovations provided at preschool

4. METHODOLOGY

A survey method was adopted for the study. Structured interviews with the woman entrepreneur and the parents of the children studying in the preschool were conducted. About 50 parents of the children studying in the preschool since 2014 were selected as the sample. A questionnaire was also provided to the entrepreneur to get an idea about the start-up, financial plan, capital requirements and challenges she faced during the starting up of preschool. The investigator conducted participant observation so as to study about the innovative strategies followed in the preschool as well as the effectiveness of the strategies. A Differential skills test on different skills was conducted by the investigator to assess academic as well as social skills among the preschool children. About 72 students studying in the institution from 4 to 6 years of age were selected to conduct the test.

Analysis And Interpretation

Steps Undertaken to Start the Preschool at Home

- She obtained a family child care license from the district authorities who checked certain requirements in terms of age, education and teaching experience, background checks, home safety, and capacity etc. She decided to be the sole proprietor of her business.
- Created a business plan for the preschool: She took a month to prepare a more detailed and thought-out plan before starting the school. Initially she verified the budget, amount to be charged as tuition fee and the expenses that might occur while running the school.
- Chosen a philosophy and curriculum: She had an idea of the type of early care and education philosophy she wanted to use in her preschool which is Play based and Montessori. She chose to combine different philosophies or aspects from a few together to create a unique program. Deciding on the philosophy and curriculum of her preschool she started designing the learning environment.
- Designed the learning environment: She transformed her living space into an enriching learning space. Thus, a home-based preschool was set up. Even Though the planning was exciting, it created anxiety in her as the budget required was more than what she had. She required a lot of new materials or renovations. To keep her home-based preschool, start-up cost low she initially started with a smaller number of children.
- Finally, she put a name for the school "Cherries"

Factors That Compelled the Woman Entrepreneur to Start the Preschool

Many factors compelled the entrepreneur to start a preschool. She is a highly qualified person in three disciplines of science. Initially she was employed in a private school with ICSE syllabus where she was paid with a meagre salary. Moreover, she was not able to acquaint with the corporal punishment and harsh form of disciplinary practices followed in the school. She was not able to adjust with the unethical practices in teaching. Joblessness, new challenges and opportunities for self-fulfillment, proof of innovative skills, and the need for additional income and economic independence are the other reasons that compelled her to start up in the preschool industry. The economic compulsion, family responsibilities and desire to fulfill her personal dream energized her to enter into a new avenue of entrepreneurship. This is supported by Manonmani (2012) who compared the fundamental reasons between the two genders for starting a business. While men often tend to start a business for profit potential and growth opportunities, women start for personal goals generally, such as a sense of achievement and accomplishment. She viewed it as a life option combining family and professional needs. She is very good in teaching and timely delivery management which also motivated her to start the school.

Challenges Encountered by the Woman Entrepreneur and Efforts Put Forward to Overcome Them

The women entrepreneur encountered a wide range of challenges at the initial start-up of Preschool. Major challenges include

- Striking a balance between family and work is one of the biggest challenges she faced
- Obtaining finance was another primary issue
- She does not possess collateral for security against debt financing.
- Negative attitude from the society
- She was not able to devote maximum time and energy for her venture as she often has the primary responsibilities of family, children and elders
- Deep-seeded conventional prejudiced socio-cultural standards and ethics of the society
- Lack of available advisors and mentors
- Lack of right support network
- Social and traditional constraints from the society

She overcame these challenges by winning the support of her family, parents and other members of the society. She took a loan from the bank which was repaid within years. She played multiple roles as a teacher, assistant and helper so as to reduce the expenditure. Within years she wins the hearts of the children who studied in the preschool who later became the brand ambassadors for the institution.

Resilience Strategies Adopted by A Woman Entrepreneur in The Development and Management of a Preschool Enterprise

The woman entrepreneur demonstrated resilience by adopting a proactive and adaptive approach to overcoming the challenges encountered during the establishment of the preschool. Faced with financial constraints, limited resources, and competition from well-established institutions, she focused on strategic planning, prudent financial management, and continuous learning. Rather than perceiving obstacles as barriers, she viewed them as opportunities for growth and innovation. She actively participated in professional development programmes, sought guidance from experienced educators and entrepreneurs, and remained informed about emerging trends in early childhood education. This commitment to lifelong learning enabled her to make informed decisions, adapt to changing educational demands, and strengthen the foundation of the preschool. Another significant resilience strategy was the entrepreneur's emphasis on building strong relationships with stakeholders. She fostered trust and collaboration among teachers, parents, and the local community through open communication, transparency, and active involvement in school activities. Recognizing that the quality of early childhood education depends largely on a motivated and competent workforce, she invested in regular teacher training, encouraged teamwork, and created a supportive work environment that promoted professional growth. She also responded positively to parents' feedback by introducing child-centered teaching methods, enhancing safety measures, and incorporating innovative learning experiences. These collaborative practices strengthened stakeholder confidence and contributed to the preschool's reputation and long-term sustainability. The entrepreneur further demonstrated resilience by embracing innovation and maintaining flexibility in managing the preschool. She integrated digital technologies, interactive teaching resources, and experiential learning activities to enrich children's educational experiences while ensuring that the curriculum remained developmentally appropriate. During periods of uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, she quickly adapted by introducing online parent engagement, virtual learning support, and enhanced health and safety protocols to ensure educational continuity. By continuously evaluating the institution's practices, diversifying learning opportunities, and maintaining a clear vision for quality early childhood education, she successfully transformed challenges into opportunities for organizational growth. These resilience strategies enabled the preschool to remain competitive, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of children, parents, and the broader educational community.

Innovative Strategies Adopted in the Preschool

Curriculum adopted in the preschool is an integration of the Letter land programmed and Montessori curriculum. The content and organisation of the preschool program is planned based on different criteria like practicability in implementation, appealing to children, involves creativity and innovation etc. The preschool adopted several innovative strategies to create a child-centered, engaging, and future-ready learning environment. A play-based and inquiry-oriented curriculum formed the foundation of the educational programmed, encouraging children to learn through exploration, experimentation, storytelling, music, art, and collaborative activities. Classrooms were designed as interactive learning spaces equipped with age-appropriate learning materials, thematic activity corners, sensory play resources, and hands-on experiences that promoted creativity, critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. The preschool also integrated technology in a balanced and developmentally appropriate manner by using interactive smart boards, digital storytelling, educational applications, and multimedia resources to enhance children's learning experiences while ensuring that screen time remained purposeful and limited.

Pedagogical approaches include storytelling, games, discussions, dramatic play, cooperative play, art work, creative writing, outdoor activities, music and dance, cleaning and arranging classroom premises, sharing food etc.

Peer tutoring is one of the specialties of the institution. Senior students help juniors in feeding, writing, reading, arranging things etc.

Parental involvement in daily activities and special functions and celebrations is quite appreciable

- Training was provided in multi-cultural activities
- Multisensory activities for the toddlers were provided
- Activities for developing fine motor skills were also incorporated
- Above all outdoor activities involving parents were arranged.

Recognizing the importance of holistic child development, the preschool implemented innovative practices that extended beyond academic learning. Social-emotional learning (SEL) was embedded into daily classroom activities through mindfulness exercises, emotion-recognition activities, cooperative games, and character education programmes that fostered empathy, self-regulation, resilience, and interpersonal skills. Individual learning plans were prepared to address the diverse developmental needs of children, while continuous formative assessment enabled teachers to monitor progress and provide timely support. The preschool also promoted experiential learning through nature walks, community visits, project-based activities, celebration of cultural events, and environmental awareness programmes, thereby connecting classroom learning with real-life experiences. The preschool adopted a variety of eco-friendly practices to foster environmental awareness and sustainable habits among young children. A plastic-free environment was encouraged by promoting the use of reusable water bottles, lunch boxes, and cloth bags instead of single-use plastics. Waste segregation was implemented through colour-coded bins for biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste, while recyclable materials such as paper, cardboard, and plastic containers were creatively reused in classroom art and craft activities. Biodegradable waste generated in the preschool was converted into compost and used to nourish the school garden, where children actively participated in planting and caring for vegetables, flowers, and medicinal plants. These hands-on experiences helped children develop a sense of responsibility toward nature while learning the importance of conservation and sustainable living. The preschool effectively integrated gamification into its teaching and learning process to create an engaging, motivating, and child-centred learning environment. Learning activities were designed using game elements such as points, badges, reward charts, levels, puzzles, treasure hunts, storytelling adventures, and collaborative challenges to encourage active participation and sustain children's interest. Educational games were incorporated into language, mathematics, science, and social-emotional learning activities, enabling children to acquire foundational concepts through play rather than rote memorization. Interactive digital games and age-appropriate educational applications were also used selectively to reinforce learning outcomes while maintaining a balanced approach to screen time. Teachers emphasized cooperation over competition by organizing team-based games that promoted communication, problem-solving, empathy, and peer interaction. Immediate positive feedback and recognition of children's efforts enhanced their confidence, intrinsic motivation, and willingness to participate in classroom activities. By integrating gamification into daily instruction, the preschool fostered curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and joyful learning, making education both meaningful and developmentally appropriate for young learners.

Effectiveness Of Innovative Strategies Followed at The Preschool

TABLE 1. Percentage of students who got cent percent in the Differential skills test

	Creativity	Critical thinking skills	Logical reasoning	Mental ability	Social skills	Linguistic skills			
						L	S	R	W
Percentage of boys	80	72	85	88	80	86	78	84	78
Percentage of girls	72	65	80	80	70	90	88	95	84
Total %	78.5	68.5	82.5	84	75	88	83	89.5	81

Table 1 reveals that the majority of the children excel in all the areas of the Differential Skills Test. Boys excelled in all areas of skills than girls' linguistic skills. This indicates that the innovative learning experiences provided in the preschool were effective on developing skills among children. A child who completed his preschool from this Cherries Montessori school is self-disciplined, creative, intrinsically motivated, socially responsible, autonomous, confident and competent to face their life. As they are given individual attention and more innovative pedagogical approaches are integrated in the teaching learning process, the preschoolers were found to be more creative problem solvers and are more prepared for life.

5. CONCLUSION

This case study highlights that resilience and innovation are fundamental to the success and sustainability of women entrepreneurs in the preschool education sector. The entrepreneurial journey examined in this study demonstrates that establishing and managing a preschool involves navigating numerous challenges, including financial constraints, societal expectations, regulatory requirements, and changing educational demands. Despite these obstacles, the entrepreneur's ability to adapt, persevere, and continuously seek opportunities for improvement enabled the successful growth and long-term sustainability of the preschool. Resilience was reflected not only in overcoming setbacks but also in maintaining a clear vision, fostering strong relationships with stakeholders, and demonstrating effective leadership in times of uncertainty. Overall, the study contributes to the growing literature on women entrepreneurship by demonstrating how resilience and innovation interact to support entrepreneurial success in the preschool education sector. The findings provide valuable insights for aspiring women entrepreneurs, educators, policymakers, and educational leaders seeking to establish sustainable and high-quality early childhood education institutions. Although the study is limited to a single case, it offers rich contextual understanding that can inform future research on women-led educational enterprises across diverse settings. Further studies involving multiple case studies and comparative analyses are recommended to deepen our understanding of the factors that foster resilience, innovation, and sustainable entrepreneurship in early childhood education.

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