

Fostering Social Justice in Entrepreneurial Education Through the Instrumentation of Instructional Leadership in Secondary Schools

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The Southeast Asian Conference on Education 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The traditional approach to instructional leadership in entrepreneurship education (EE) instruction has predominantly concentrated on business skills. Consequently, with this approach, schools risk reproducing individualistic or purely market-centric entrepreneurs that sideline civic purpose and social impact. This conventional model of instructional leadership tends to sustain and reinforce the exploitative tendencies inherent in capitalism. The purpose of this study is to investigate how instructional leaders can embed social justice principles in entrepreneurial education, thereby promoting equity, inclusivity, and fairness in teaching methods and curriculum delivery. The study employs Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory to reconceptualize entrepreneurial education not merely as a means of imparting business skills but as a catalyst for societal and personal transformation culminating in a socially just society. Utilizing a conceptual framework and an integrative literature review methodology, the study synthesizes insights from relevant literature published between 2010 and 2025, sourced from Wiley, Scopus, ERIC, and Taylor and Francis online databases. The findings indicate that instructional leaders in schools lack the requisite understanding and expertise to effectively integrate social justice into entrepreneurship pedagogy. The study recommends that instructional leaders should be empowered to develop the competencies necessary to incorporate social justice into the pedagogy of entrepreneurial education, thereby fostering socially responsible instructional leadership and schools that are socially transformative. It is anticipated that these findings will inform both policy and practice where policies prioritise and address social inequalities, and entrepreneurship education is seen as a tool for nurturing values like fairness and equity.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, instructional leadership, social justice, transformative learning theory

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Introduction

Over the last decade, entrepreneurship education (EE) has expanded across school systems and have moved beyond a narrow emphasis on firm formation. It has encompassed a broader set of competencies like creativity, agency, ethical judgment, and value creation for active citizenship and personal development (Bacigalupo et al., 2016; Göksen-Olgun et al., 2022; OECD, 2022). In European policy, the EntreComp framework codifies this wider scope by positioning entrepreneurship as a key competence for life, work, and democratic participation, rather than solely new-venture creation (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Empirical syntheses focused on primary and secondary levels, reported that school-based EE increasingly adopts experiential pedagogies and community-oriented projects, though provision remains uneven across curricula and teacher preparation dimensions (Göksen-Olgun et al., 2022; OECD, 2022).

Entrepreneurship education is often lauded as a driver for reducing economic inequality by equipping learners with the ability to generate income and create employment opportunities (Brown, 2018). It has gained global importance (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021), relevance popularity because of its ability to promote economic well-being (Lee & Rodriguez-Pose, 2021). EE is considered to drive economic growth (Doran et al., 2018). Many countries, including South Africa, have incorporated entrepreneurship education into school curricula to advance social justice through economic equality (Aransyah et al., 2023; Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2016). However, despite the relevance of entrepreneurship education, South Africa still faces persistent high youth unemployment and social unrest. The current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) incorporates entrepreneurship content in a limited and fragmented manner, often confined to isolated subjects like Economic and Management Science (EMS) (Du Toit & Kempen, 2020).

This paper positions economic equality and fairness as crucial aspects of social justice, highlighting entrepreneurship as a potential solution for reducing unemployment and creating opportunities for income generation. While traditional entrepreneurship education has focused primarily on business skill, which gives rise to economic value, some concerned scholars advocate for a broader framing under the term entrepreneurial learning or entrepreneurial education (Lackéus et al., 2016; Schoeniger et al., 2021). Entrepreneurial learning emphasizes self-directed learning and an entrepreneurial mindset, where learners actively create value not only for themselves but also for others (Du Toit, 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of entrepreneurship education (EE) as a critical component of secondary schooling, a significant gap persists in integrating social justice into its design and delivery. Much of EE remains oriented toward economic goals such as self-employment, profit-making, and competitiveness, often neglecting broader social and ethical dimensions (Göksen-Olgun et al., 2022; OECD, 2022). This narrow emphasis risks reinforcing existing inequalities by privileging market-oriented outcomes over equity, inclusivity, and community well-being. As UNESCO (2020) notes, education systems that do not explicitly address inclusion and equity perpetuate barriers for marginalized learners, undermining the transformative potential of EE.

One factor contributing to this gap is the limited scope of traditional instructional leadership approaches. Instructional leadership has been consistently linked to student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021), yet in many contexts, school leaders focus on managerial or technical functions such as compliance, resource management, and performance monitoring at the expense of promoting equity-oriented pedagogical practices (Khalifa et al., 2016; UNESCO,

2025). While instructional leaders play a crucial role in shaping the teaching and learning environment, evidence indicates that many remain underprepared to support teachers in embedding social justice into curriculum and pedagogy (Wallace Foundation, 2023). This results in a mismatch between the transformative aims of EE and the leadership practices guiding its implementation.

Given these limitations, there is an urgent need to reimagine entrepreneurial education as more than the acquisition of business skills. Grounding EE in social justice principles can foster critical reflection, civic engagement, and inclusive value creation, preparing learners not only to succeed economically but also to contribute meaningfully to equitable social transformation (Bacigalupo et al., 2016; Mezirow, 2000; UNESCO, 2025). This requires instructional leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, dispositions, and competencies to guide educators in adopting pedagogical approaches that advance fairness, inclusivity, and equity. Without this shift, EE risks entrenching exploitative practices rather than becoming a catalyst for societal change. Hence, this study aims to explore the role of instructional leadership in promoting social justice principles in entrepreneurship education in secondary schools, with a focus on fostering equity, inclusivity, and fairness in teaching and learning.

Research Questions

1. How can instructional leadership facilitate equity, inclusivity and fairness within entrepreneurial education?
2. What strategies can be used to empower instructional leaders with the competencies needed to guide teachers in incorporating social justice into entrepreneurship teaching and learning?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurial education (EE) emerged from a business subject niche to an educational paradigm positioned to advance knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour linked with innovation and entrepreneurship. Its focus has been broadened from merely focusing on new business creation to embrace a wider scope of competencies applicable in social and personal life (Mwasalwiba, 2010). The European Commission (2021) asserts that entrepreneurial learning is the ability of an individual to act upon ideas and opportunities to create value for others, be it social, cultural or financial. The goal of EE is to enable learners acquire entrepreneurial abilities, a combination of attitude, information and varied skills (Ndofirepi, 2020). Contemporary literature increasingly emphasises the gap between entrepreneurial education content and the practical needs of African societies to foster equality, inclusiveness and fairness in their entrepreneurial activities, which would decolonise the exploitative tendencies inherent in capitalism. Olutuase et al. (2023) buttress the need to reconsider the present entrepreneurship models to enhance an entrepreneurial mindset that is adaptable and innovative to the local market needs of the African community. At its core, entrepreneurial education aims to equip learners to navigate organisational complexities, make informed market decisions, and enhance sustainable growth (Theofanous et al., 2024). By embracing inclusivity, fairness and equality as a foundational principle, business schools have the opportunity to not only teach future leaders business skills and profit maximisation, but also to promote the civic and social impact of businesses.

Instructional Leadership in Entrepreneurship Education

Leadership for learning has predominantly gained global recognition since the 80s and has increasingly been associated with instructional leadership (Enebe et al., 2025; Hallinger, 2015). Glickman et al. (2017) attributed principals' leadership to effective instructional management and accentuate that principals' managerial disposition affects learners through instructional organisation and school climate. Similarly, Neumerski et al., (2018) alluded that instructional leadership of the principal is a committed engagement in the professional development of teachers and constant improvement of the instructional programme. Internationally, it is argued that school leaders rank teacher development, collaborative planning and curriculum mediation as determinants of how innovations such as EE are enacted and interpreted at the classroom level (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2025). Although many principals promote varied teaching and learning practices, some literature reviews on school leadership highlighted a continual gap in justice and equity-oriented capabilities, with unequal competencies to develop preparatory programs (Grissom et al., 2021; Jackson, 2024; Wallace Foundation, 2023). This persistent gap is important for EE, especially when it is framed solely as a business skills, schools risk reproducing individualistic or purely market-centric logics that undermine social impact and civic responsibilities (Bacigalupo et al., 2016), as compared to when leadership portrays entrepreneurship as learning to create value for others, which opens space to equity, inclusiveness and community-engaged pedagogies (Göksen-Olgun et al., 2022). This review looked at school leadership that are socially responsive, the type that fights systemic injustice and inequalities through EE.

Social Justice in Education

Social justice in education is an educational endeavour with clear implications in developing inclusive and equitable educational ecosystems where every learner thrives (Chaaban et al., 2025). This phenomenon concerns the redistribution of resources and opportunities, acknowledgement of different identities and participation in decision-making that all learners experience equal access, belonging and achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). The Global Monitoring highlights that inclusion involves more than access, to entail transforming day-to-day instruction, examinations, and school culture to tackle structural challenges experienced by marginalised groups (UNESCO, 2020). Guiding teachers to question pedagogy and curriculum by instructional leaders, creates a community that imbibe culturally responsive practices that align professional learning and assessment with the goals of equity (Thomson & Hillman, 2020). Through Mezirow's transformative learning theory, entrepreneurial learning can become a platform where learners courageously scrutinise conventions on society and economy, and embrace new ways of value creation that foster collective well-being and equity (Bacigalupo et al., 2016; Mezirow, 2000). This study, therefore, examines how instructional leaders can support EE teachers to incorporate the principles of social justice in the design and facilitation of entrepreneurial learning in secondary schools, so that it functions not only as business skill acquisition but as a fulcrum for personal and community transformation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by transformative learning theory (TLT) by Jack Mezirow (1997), which opined that learning goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and requires tangible transformation in how individuals understand their social world and themselves. Mezirow (1997, 2000) portrays that transformative learning occurs as learners reflect critically on

perceived assumptions, often brought about by disorienting information, which leads to perception transformation. TLT involves interrogating existing ideologies, participating in intellectual discourse, and imbibing equitable, inclusive and integrative worldviews. Here, learning is connected to personal growth and social transformation, rather than being just cognitive.

TLT can be instrumental to entrepreneurial education, as it provides a framework for recreating the purpose of education. Instructional leaders have traditionally been criticised for narrowing the scope of EE to business skills, competition, and profit-making, thus replicating the capitalist logic (Göksen-Olgun et al., 2022; OECD, 2022). The prevalence of such dominant capitalist logic perpetuates systemic inequality and marginalisation, rather than consolidating inclusivity and ethics. However, when sought through the lens of TLT, EE can potentially serve as a framework for promoting learners' reflection on cultural, social and economic well-being that reimagines entrepreneurial practices of community engagement, fairness and social justice (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). The transformative learning approach exposes learners to question age-long systemic structures and to understand entrepreneurship as not only for economic ventures but also as a means to contend with societal injustices.

More so, this theory is pertinent when discussing the issue of social justice, whose mandate is to dismantle systemic barriers and ensure access, equity and consideration for marginalised learners (Khalifa et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2020). Importantly, instructional leaders are instrumental in promoting a school atmosphere where transformative learning can be nurtured. As demonstrated by Grissom et al. (2021), effective instructional leadership is as paramount as classroom teaching in influencing learners' performance. On the contrary, school leadership that is narrowed to administrative and managerial practices risks sidelining the bigger social dimension of schooling. For instructional leadership to embed transformative learning would require training them with the capabilities to guide entrepreneurship teachers in inculcating fairness, equity and inclusivity into instruction. Drawing on TLT, it is fundamental for instructional leaders to assist teachers in fashioning entrepreneurial learning experiences that would inspire learners to critique dominant assumptions, participate in mind-transforming dialogue and create responsive entrepreneurial solutions. Embedding TLT in EE will potentially catalyse social transformation through aligning social justice principles with entrepreneurial learning. In this study, we used TLT to articulate how instructional leadership can encourage teachers to adapt inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial practices in secondary schools.

Methodology

Integrative Literature Review (ILR)

The study is grounded in the ILR approach. Data was gathered from different sources to buttress and understand the topic of interest (Torraco, 2016). ILR is different from a typical systematic literature review that synthesises existing knowledge, ILR is a multifaceted approach to gathering data. It also differs from PRISMA as it gathers data from varied sources, including peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed journal articles, government gazette, policy documents and relevant documents in the public domain (Nedeljko et al., 2023). ILR is also known for its hallmark in clarifying grey areas and identifying gaps in a research niche (Boote & Beile, 2005).

Rationale

The rationale for choosing ILR for this study is because of the complexities surrounding embedding social justice in entrepreneurial learning by instructional leaders. ILR is prominent in making sense of complex ideas such as the transitioning from a traditional approach to entrepreneurial learning marked by mere business skills and capitalism to an approach defined by inclusivity, equity and fairness. Dhollande et al. (2021) observed that this approach makes provision for a structured framework that synthesises varied literature and identifies main themes. ILR is suitable for this study as it gives an understanding of the various ways in which instructional leadership could avert the risk of reproducing purely market-centred entrepreneur (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Instructional leadership, on one hand, stresses the use of effective teaching methods. While on the other hand, social justice practices urge instructional leaders to include culturally responsive and inclusive instruction that connects content respectfully and equitably with the variety of languages and cultures (Shaked, 2023).

ILR is suitable for this study as it gives a wholesome understanding of strategies which instructional leaders could implement to promote social justice in the entrepreneurship classroom. It facilitates the synthesis of literature on fostering social justice in entrepreneurial learning through the instrumentation of instructional leadership. Torraco ILR model was adopted out of the many forms of ILR because we want to create an actionable model for instructional leaders to advance social justice in entrepreneurial education. Torraco (2005, 2016) specifically states this idea:

Synthesising the literature means that the review weaves the streams of research together to focus on the core issues rather than simply reporting on previous literature. Synthesis is not a data dump. It is a creative process that generates a new model, conceptual framework, or other unique conception informed by the author's intimate knowledge of the topic. (2005, p. 362)

Five Steps Approach by Torraco to ILR

This study adopted Torraco's (2016) five-step model to conduct an ILR. These steps include a. problem formulation, b. literature search, c. data evaluation, d. data analysis, and e. presentation/writing. Using this model, we synthesised existing literature and theoretical ideas by using the following steps. The study began with mapping out the study's objectives. Following, we conducted a literature search on Wiley, Scopus, ERIC, and Taylor and Francis online databases and grey literature from the Department of Basic Education gazette, Republic of South Africa, thereby having a dual perspective of reviewed and grey literature (Bramer et al., 2017; Ewald et al., 2022; Harari et al., 2020) on fostering social justice in entrepreneurial education by instructional leadership.

Here are some of the keywords used during our search to identify relevant literature: "social justice", "social justice in the education classroom", "entrepreneurial learning", "entrepreneurship education in secondary schools", "instructional leadership", "inclusive education". The combination of the above keywords was done for the respective database using Boolean operators, for instance, "OR" and "AND" to ensure that important literature was curated for the study (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). We synthesised and added studies that examined social justice in teaching and learning and instructional leadership in entrepreneurship education.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In ILR, part of its requirement is the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria in the study to ensure that only relevant literature is included. The publication year of the included articles was between 2010 and 2025. The inclusion criteria included studies that explored social justice, inclusivity, and equity in the classroom, and the role of instructional leadership in facilitating entrepreneurial learning. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, we included government gazettes and policy documents. More so, in our exclusion criteria, we excluded studies that did not explore social justice, equity and inclusion in the classroom, and not within the said years. Also, studies in entrepreneurial education and instructional leadership that fell before 2015 were excluded from the study.

Mitigation of Bias and Ensuring Quality Assurance

Bias mitigation and quality assurance were achieved through triangulation (Meydan & Akkas, 2024). The researchers used independent perspectives to screen studies. We compared our findings, discussed any differences, and reached an agreement on what should and shouldn't be part of the current study. This helped to balance individual interpretations and subjectivities. The study incorporated electronic systematic database searches (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013), reflexive activities to understand alternative perspectives (Barrett et al., 2020), and used critical appraisal instruments (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018). We equally maintained an unbiased view of the aim of the study by adding grey literature, for instance, the government gazette, policy documents, and other valuable resources in the public domain. These documents were equally fact-checked rigorously to ensure alignment with the study's focus.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the study's findings and places them in the existing body of literature. These findings are presented in accordance with the two research questions of the study; how can instructional leadership facilitate equity, inclusivity and fairness within entrepreneurial education?, and what strategies can be used to empower instructional leaders with the competencies needed to guide teachers in incorporating social justice into entrepreneurship teaching and learning?

Facilitation of Equity, Inclusivity and Fairness by Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is critical in the educational system, as it contributes meaningfully to promoting learners' achievement and education quality generally. Instructional leaders are pivotal in the educational system as they are charged with the task of establishing an academic vision, enhancing a collaborative culture among teachers, and employing data to foster instructional decisions (Akomodi, 2025). This leadership is not only to oversee educational activities but also to create an atmosphere that breeds development and professional growth among teachers. Enebe et al. (2025) observe that this leadership approach entails setting clear goals, teacher support, and fostering a collaborative environment that facilitates overall learner and school outcomes.

This leadership plays a prominent role in enhancing inclusivity, equity and fairness in entrepreneurial education through shaping pedagogical approaches, curriculum choices, school culture and resource allocation (Munna, 2023). Importantly, leaders encourage inclusive

entrepreneurship learning by inculcating visions grounded in human rights principles and fairness (Du Toit, 2023). UNESCO (2017) assert that entrepreneurship learning becomes essential to the backgrounds, diverse experiences and aspirations of learners when equity is included in a programme's goals and curriculum. Instructional leaders, in this way, enable entrepreneurial education to be taught not merely as a business development course, but largely as a means for community engagement and social empowerment. McCarthy-Kettledas et al. (2024) stress that entrepreneurial learning is a self-directed approach, that encourages learners to imbibe entrepreneurial mindsets than being taught narrowly to be an entrepreneur with the aim of starting a business. The goal of this learning extends to promoting value creation for others and exposes learners to partake in social justice (Schoeniger et al., 2021).

Similarly, entrepreneurial learning offers opportunities which are beyond economic outcomes to incorporate cultural, social and environmental outcomes (Lackeus et al., 2016). The two first outcomes (cultural and social) can be harnessed by instructional leaders to facilitate equity, inclusivity, and fairness. Instructional leaders can help preserve cultural assets, and indigenous knowledge, which contributes to inclusion and unity in areas such as creative industries and tourism, than treating this solely as economic venture. Providing guidance to teachers to critique curriculum and pedagogy fosters community of learners that embrace culturally responsive practices that are in tandem with the goals of equity (Thomson & Hillman, 2020). Looking at Mezirow's transformative learning theory, entrepreneurial learning can form a pedestal for learner to critique societal conventions on economy and imbibe new dimensions of value creation that promote equity, inclusivity and general well-being (Bacigalupo et al., 2016; Mezirow, 2000). On the other hand, Hlady-Rispa and Servantie (2016) opine that social value arises when entrepreneurial learning addresses social problems and prioritizes social missions over profit. The goal of social entrepreneurship is to reduce systemic inequalities and foster change which aligns with the aim of social justice (Duncan-Horner et al., 2022). In sum, entrepreneurial learning can be repositioned as a path to collective good and societal transformation through instructional leadership.

Strategies for Instructional Leaders to Empower Teachers to Incorporate Social Justice in Entrepreneurial Learning

Empowering instructional leaders with the skills essential to guide teachers to embed social justice into entrepreneurial education requires intentional preparation, joint professional learning, and reflective practice. Salient to this development is equity-driven training and socially just leadership practices. Leaders' understanding of how inequalities shape learners' outcomes and cultural responsiveness help them to support teachers in addressing these inequalities within entrepreneurial curricula (Theoharis, 2007). This preparation position leaders to model justice-oriented and reflective dispositions required to guide teachers effectively.

Moreso, deepening leaders' understanding of entrepreneurial pedagogies is another strategy that lends itself to social justice integration. Pedagogies such as experiential and problem-based learning are central to entrepreneurial education (Lee & Rodrigues, 2021). The understanding of these pedagogies can assist instructional leaders to mentor teachers to design projects that not only develop business skills but promotes community engagement and critical awareness. In support of this, collaborative learning communities would provide structured opportunities for leaders and teachers to analyse equity concerns, examine classroom practices and co-develop teaching units that embed social justice. Formation of this type of communities foster

collective capacity and distributed leadership which is paramount in promoting and sustaining social justice (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018).

Finally, reflective tools can also boost instructional leaders' effectiveness in justice-oriented guidance. Critical incidents analysis, equity audits and bias checklists offer structured ways for leaders to investigate assumptions and recognise in what ways inequities surface in school programs (DeMatthews, 2018). As leaders take on reflective practices, they are most prepared to foster same reflection among teachers, ensuring that instructional decisions align with the principles of equity, fairness and inclusivity. Meanwhile, entrepreneurial education involves varied socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds in which leaders must have firm understanding in culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2018) asserts that training assist leaders to support teachers in designing culturally entrepreneurial settings that promote learners' lived experiences and identities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined social justice in entrepreneurial education through the instrumentation of instructional leadership in secondary schools. The findings highlight the importance of embedding social justice in the teaching and learning of entrepreneurial education for foster inclusivity, equity and fairness. Entrepreneurship education had been taught merely for the acquisition of business skills and competition mindset which have perpetuated inequality. The study contributes to practice, policy and body of knowledge by devising ways for instructional leaders to facilitate social justice in entrepreneurial education through culturally responsive pedagogies and professional training of teachers. The insights gained from this study hold promise for shaping future educational and leadership training programmes. We recommend that instructional leaders, policy makers and school boards recognise the importance of embedding social justice into entrepreneurial education curriculum and pedagogy, preparing learners not only to succeed economically but also to contribute meaningfully to equitable social transformation.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary data and theoretical constructs, hence, conceptual in nature. This methodological construct might limit our understanding of how social justice could play out in schools and how instructional leaders embed it in the curriculum and pedagogy. Additionally, since the context of the study is South Africa, it might be necessary to carry out this study in other cultural or policy environments. The study employed Mezirow's transformative learning theory as its sole theoretical lens. While this theory is suitable for the study, it may not adequately provide answers for institutional, structural, and political constraints that shape instructional leadership practices in schools. As a result, other theoretical perspectives may provide contrasting or complementary explanations of how social justice is integrated in entrepreneurial education.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Based on the above limitations, future research could consider an empirical validation of this research across school environments to assess its real-world effectiveness and practicality. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods designs are needed to further understand how instructional leaders enact social justice in entrepreneurial education in a real school setting. Similarly, studies across different national or regional contexts would promote understanding

of how policy frameworks, socio-economic, and cultural values impart the integration of social justice into entrepreneurial education. Additionally, further studies could use alternative theories, such as critical pedagogy, social justice leadership theory or human capital and capabilities theories, to deepen understanding of structural inequalities and ethical dimension of entrepreneurial education.

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