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THE ROLE OF PRESCHOOL ENTREPRENEURS IN MINIMIZING EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN KELANTAN

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Abstract:

Emotional and behavioural problems (EBP) in early childhood are linked to adverse academic, social and long-term mental health outcomes. While existing research mainly focuses on child-level factors, parenting practices and classroom interventions, limited attention has been given to preschool entrepreneurs as organisational leaders who influence institutional climate, teacher practices and preventive support systems. Leadership studies in early childhood education have largely concentrated on formal administrative or Western institutional models, with insufficient exploration of culturally embedded entrepreneurial leadership in non-Western contexts. This gap limits the application of the biopsychosocio-environmental model beyond individual-level analysis to organisational leadership processes.

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This qualitative study examined how preschool entrepreneurs in Kelantan help minimise EBP by using the biopsychosocio-environmental model as a guiding framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight preschool entrepreneurs and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings identified four interconnected leadership domains: i) creating nurturing learning environments, ii) providing structured emotional regulation support and empathic leadership practices, iii) strengthening organisational capacity through strategic leadership, and iv) fostering systemic multi-stakeholder collaboration. These domains interact to create a preventive organisational mechanism in which emotional security, developmental alignment and coordinated professional support collectively to reduce behavioural risks. The study extends the biopsychosocio-environmental model to the organisational leadership context of early childhood education and highlights the importance of integrating entrepreneurial leadership into policy, training and regulatory frameworks aimed at promoting children's emotional and behavioural well-being.

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Emotional And Behavioural Difficulties, Early Childhood Management, Biopsychosocio-Environmental Framework, Preschool Leadership



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Introduction

Preschool children with emotional and behavioural problems (EBP) are at risk of significant difficulties that can affect their early developmental years and may persist into later life (Wang et al., 2024). During this critical stage, children begin to develop emotions, form social interactions with peers and learn to resolve conflicts (Malik & Marwaha, 2022). If unrecognised, EBP can have long-term consequences for academic achievement, social functioning and mental health (Mekonnen et al., 2020).

Preschool entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in creating high-quality early learning environments that effectively manage EBP, providing long-term cognitive and social benefits (Nutton, 2020). Preschool settings are instrumental in identifying and addressing EBP, with entrepreneurs often leading the development of support systems and interventions. Strategies focusing on social-emotional learning (SEL), structured play-based activities and positive teacher-child interactions have been shown to reduce problem behaviours and enhance emotional regulation (Bierman et al., 2020; Crooks et al., 2020; Healey & Healey, 2019; Sanders et al., 2020). The effectiveness of these interventions is further strengthened by consistent emotional support from preschool staff, particularly for children with lower self-regulatory capacities (Bailey et al., 2022). Moreover, the successful implementation of parenting programmes, such as the Triple P programme, highlights the importance of organisational leadership in adapting,

sustaining and scaling interventions to reach diverse families while maintaining positive outcomes over time (Dahlberg et al., 2022). This study extends the biopsychosocio-environmental model by applying it to the organisational leadership context of early childhood education, specifically by examining preschool entrepreneurs as systemic agents influencing children's emotional and behavioural outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of preschool entrepreneurs in minimizing emotional and behavioural problems among preschool children in Kelantan.

Literature Review

Preschool entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in shaping a positive organisational climate, as adverse workplace environments have been empirically linked to increased work-family conflict and higher levels of teacher burnout (Ji & Yue, 2020). Effective entrepreneurial leadership is therefore fundamental to establishing supportive organisational structures that protect teacher well-being, enhance professional performance and foster sustainable preschool environments, ultimately contributing to optimal child development outcomes (Yan et al., 2022).

Guided by the biopsychosocio-environmental model, the behaviours and decisions of preschool entrepreneurs influence multiple interrelated domains. Entrepreneurial practices affect the environmental domain through the quality of the physical preschool setting and organisational systems, while also shaping the social and psychological domains by influencing teachers' emotional well-being and the quality of teacher-child interactions. To reduce behavioural challenges and improve children's social skills, preschool entrepreneurs should prioritise continuous professional development for teachers, including training in classroom management, technology use and social-emotional learning. These efforts should be supported by fair remuneration, strong organisational support and strategic initiatives to retain qualified teachers (Badau & Trifan, 2022; Cahyati et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023).

Research evidence further highlights the value of well-planned institutional interventions. For example, the DeCo-S.E. educational programme has been found to improve children's social skills and reduce behavioural difficulties, demonstrating the importance of supportive learning environments for healthy social and emotional development (Badau & Trifan, 2022). Similarly, the ChAMP system, which uses mobile health technology, has shown high accuracy in the early identification of anxiety, depression and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) through multimodal data analysis, providing valuable tools for timely identification and intervention (Loftness et al., 2023). From a biopsychosocio-environmental perspective, these innovations support multiple areas of development by strengthening the psychological domain through early intervention, the social domain through improved professional support and the environmental domain through enhanced institutional systems and technological resources.

In addition, strong partnerships between parents and teachers enable the sharing of ideas and information from both home and school. This allows teachers to provide support that is more individualised, responsive and appropriate to each child's developmental needs (Cuartas et al., 2022; Loftness et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2019). From an organisational perspective, effective marketing practices such as building a clear and recognisable brand, conducting regular market research, using digital platforms strategically and actively seeking parental feedback can strengthen a preschool's competitiveness while supporting continuous improvements in service quality (Latif et al., 2021). Within the biopsychosocio-environmental model, organisational

sustainability enhances the environmental domain by ensuring ongoing access to high-quality learning environments and services and supports the social domain by maintaining long-term relationships with families and the wider community. These factors contribute to emotionally secure and well-resourced preschool settings, which indirectly support children's emotional and behavioural well-being through stable care and consistently high-quality provision.

Materials And Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of preschool entrepreneurs in addressing EBP among preschool children in Kelantan. The qualitative approach was chosen to obtain in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives regarding early childhood emotional and behavioural development.

Participants

A total of eight preschool entrepreneurs managing preschool centres in Kelantan participated in this study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on entrepreneurs who were directly involved in managing preschool operations and early childhood learning environments.

Data Collection

Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) to facilitate interactive sharing of experiences and observations related to children's EBP. The FGDs provided opportunities for participants to discuss institutional practices, leadership strategies and environmental factors influencing children's emotional and behavioural development. Data collection continued until thematic data saturation was achieved, where no new themes emerged from the discussions.

Data Transcription and Analysis

All FGD sessions were transcribed verbatim to preserve the accuracy and meaning of participants' responses. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to EBP management. Coding procedures were conducted systematically to ensure rigorous data interpretation.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility of the findings was enhanced through methodological triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was achieved by comparing information across participants, while member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interpreted data.

Findings

Using thematic analysis, four main themes were identified: (1) Creating Nurturing Learning Environments, (2) Structured Emotional Regulation Support and Empathic Leadership Practices, (3) Strategic Leadership and Organisational Capacity Building and (4) Systemic

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Institutional Networking. Each theme comprises several subthemes that reflect the multidimensional aspects of children’s biological, psychological, social and environmental needs (Table 1).

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes of Qualitative Analysis

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	LINK TO THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL MODEL
Creating Nurturing Learning Environments	Safe and Calming Spaces	Biological & Environmental domains
	Development-Based Environment	Psychological & Environmental domains
Structured Emotional Regulation Support and Empathic Leadership Practices	Substitute Parenting and Nurturing Values	Biological & Psychological domains
	Embedding Empathy in Teaching	Psychological & Social domains
	Fostering Self-Confidence and Emotional Skills	Psychological domain
	Balancing Discipline and Warmth	Psychological & Social domains
Strategic Leadership and Organisational Capacity Building	Role Modelling and Teacher Training	Psychological & Social domains
	Recruiting and Guiding Quality Teachers	Social & Environmental domains
Systemic Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Institutional Networking	Creating Family-Preschool Partnerships	Social domain
	Organising Parenting Programs and Workshops	Social & Environmental domains
	Building Networks with Child Experts	Social & Environmental domains

Theme 1: Creating Nurturing Learning Environments

Subtheme 1: Safe and Calming Spaces

Participant emphasized the importance of providing designated areas where children could manage stress and regulate their emotions. Some children preferred a quiet space, while others required physical outlets such as jumping on a trampoline.

“If he cries, he likes to sit alone in a corner. So we need to have one corner. Where that corner will help the child calm down when he is stressed. But maybe there are children who, when they are stressed, want to go out and want to get on the trampoline. They want to jump on the trampoline.” (Participant 8).

In addition, participant recognized that certain children, such as those with autism, may need different arrangements to keep sensory experiences from becoming overwhelming.

“There are children who need quiet time. For example, children with autism, right? They are very easily distracted. You need to know that this child, during mealtime, doesn't like using plastic plates. You have to provide aluminium plates, for example, because they like to play by tapping like that.” (Participant 8).

Participant further highlighted that some children are highly sensitive to cluttered or overstimulating environments, which can increase stress and disruptive behaviours.

“Some children are very sensitive. They don't like to see a lot of clutter. Some need quiet time and prefer to sit quietly, like children with autism. They can get easily distracted. Also, children with ADHD may feel overwhelmed when there are many things around and might make a mess.” (Participant 8).

This demonstrates the importance of providing safe and peaceful environments that meet individual needs, enabling children to regulate themselves and focus on learning. Overall, the findings suggest that offering a safe and calming environment is a preventive, rather than merely supportive, aspect of the classroom's regulatory function. Preschool entrepreneurs, by recognising sensory stimuli and emotional overload, can manage environmental factors that may trigger behavioural outbursts. Rather than reacting to behavioural issues, preschool entrepreneurs take a proactive approach by modifying the classroom environment to promote self-regulation, thereby implying that environmental change is a strategy for addressing EBP.

Subtheme 2: Development-Based Environment

Another dimension of nurturing environments relates to ensuring that teaching and learning activities are developmentally appropriate. Participant emphasized that preschool entrepreneurs should be tailored to children's developmental stages rather than enforcing higher-level expectations prematurely. As one participant expressed:

“Because here in this kindergarten, we teach according to the children's developmental level. We cannot always push them to learn at a high level, because each child develops at a different pace.” (Participant 3).

Preschool entrepreneurs played a role in ensuring that updated materials, teaching aids, and technology were provided to support learning without causing stress. One participant explained:

“So, all the materials, teaching aids, technology and modules introduced at the school level are really meant to support children's development. The use of up-to-date resources makes the learning process in school and the teaching and learning activities very engaging, without the children realizing whether there is any stress or not.” (Participant 6).

Another participant emphasized the role of toys and play-based materials in supporting children's natural development.

“Include all the toys.” (Participant 8).

This suggests that developmental environments not only support children's learning but also protect them from stress-related behavioural difficulties. By aligning learning expectations with children's developmental readiness, providing suitable learning resources, and emphasising play-based approaches, preschool entrepreneurs create emotionally safe and cognitively appropriate environments that help prevent behavioural challenges. High-performing entrepreneurs stand out in their ability to consistently integrate these elements, ensuring that developmental sensitivity is embedded in organisational practices rather than being left to individual teachers.

Theme 2: Structured Emotional Regulation Support and Empathic Leadership Practices

Subtheme 1: Substitute Parenting and Nurturing Values

The participant noted that their role goes beyond teaching, as it also involves aspects of parenting. At times, they saw themselves as providing extra care, especially when parents were unable to fully meet their children's emotional needs.

“When comparing the times we care for the children with the time parents do, it seems that we look after them more than the parents. So, what we can do is to instil love towards parents and teach them to respect their parents. In this way, we also take on some of the parents' roles.” (Participant 1).

This statement illustrates the dual responsibility of preschool entrepreneurs, not only as teachers but also as nurturers who instil values such as respect and empathy toward parents and others. Beyond moral education, this role may serve as protective relational support that enhances the child's emotional security. Preschool entrepreneurs can contribute to the development of emotional stability and prosocial behaviour of the child, which is directly related to EBP. When these supportive relational strategies are incorporated into the preschool's routine and expectations, rather than being dependent on the teacher, a stable emotional environment can be created for the child by helping to alleviate stress from the outside of school setting.

Subtheme 2: Embedding Empathy in Teaching

Participants emphasized the importance of teaching with empathy in daily practice. They explained that recognizing children's emotions is the key to create a positive learning environment.

“We must first understand children's emotions and take care of them so that our daily activities can run smoothly. If their feelings are good and their mood is positive, they will be ready to learn.” (Participant 4).

Another participant explained that empathy helps teachers handle negative behaviours in a more positive way.

“With empathy, we can help improve the child when they show negative behaviours, because only when the teacher builds closeness, the child is able to accept it. If the teacher keeps scolding, the child will just become stressed.” (Participant 5).

Apart from fostering positive relationships, empathetic teaching functions as a relational regulation mechanism that reduces children's emotional defensiveness. When teachers respond with understanding rather than punishment, children feel emotionally safe. This sense of safety reduces stress and makes them more receptive to guidance. Instead of reacting with resistance or withdrawal, children are more likely to understand and internalise behavioural expectations. At the organisational level, preschool entrepreneurs play an important role in making empathy a shared teaching practice, rather than relying on individual teacher personalities. By promoting consistent empathetic approaches across classrooms, they help create a stable emotional climate that supports long-term reductions in EBP.

Subtheme 3: Fostering Self-Confidence and Emotional Skills

Participants emphasized that children should be encouraged to explore, make mistakes, and express their ideas without fear of criticism. One participant noted:

"If we don't restrict children or constantly scold them, they will gain confidence, become brave to try things out and be willing to explore. Early childhood education is important to build emotional confidence." (Participant 1).

The same participant also explained that teachers have a role in appreciating and acknowledging children's contributions.

"We give children the chance to speak, and teachers encourage them to talk and appreciate their efforts without criticizing. Then they will share their ideas. If teachers keep criticizing, the child will become fearful, leading to a timid child who lacks confidence." (Participant 1).

In this context, fostering self-confidence is a proactive emotional competence-building strategy that reduces the likelihood of behavioural dysregulation. When children have opportunities to express themselves without fear of criticism, they develop emotional security and internal self-worth, which in turn decreases attention-seeking or oppositional behaviours. Rather than relying on external behavioural control, children gradually internalise confidence and emotional regulation capacities. This suggests that supportive teacher responses serve as a preventive developmental mechanism, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to EBP.

Subtheme 4: Balancing Discipline and Warmth

Participant noted that while empathy and care are important, it is also necessary to balance warmth with proper discipline. They explained that being too soft or too strict can harm children.

"We should not be too harsh or too soft with children. Instead, we must be firm when the situation requires it." (Participant 7).

Within this context, balancing discipline and warmth reflects an authoritative regulatory approach that promotes internal behavioural control rather than fear-based compliance. When firmness is applied within a context of emotional security, children are more likely to perceive boundaries as protective rather than punitive. This reduces oppositional reactions and emotional resistance, which are common precursors to behavioural escalation. By combining

structure with empathy, teachers facilitate the internalisation of behavioural norms, promote self-regulation and mitigate persistent EBP.

Theme 3: Strategic Leadership and Organisational Capacity Building

Subtheme 1: Role-Modelling and Teacher Training

Participant emphasized that children learn extensively through observation, imitating the behaviours and attitudes of teachers and preschool entrepreneurs. As a result, role-modelling is seen as a core responsibility of teachers and preschool entrepreneurs.

One participant highlighted how entrepreneurs themselves set the tone for teachers and children.

“Children observe a lot; they watch their teachers. So, it is the role of the preschool entrepreneur to guide teachers to do good things for the children. If the entrepreneurs themselves show kindness to the children, the children will copy that behaviour.” (Participant 1).

Another participant noted that the actions of teachers strongly influence children’s behaviour both at school and at home.

“In fact, children imitate many actions from their teachers. Whatever behaviour the teacher demonstrates, the child will bring it home—for example, saying thank you, showing gratitude, or reciting prayers. Children will copy these things, so it becomes the role of the preschool entrepreneur to also guide teachers to model good behaviour for the children.” (Participant 1).

In addition, participant emphasized the importance of preparing teachers to handle children with different needs through proper briefing and training.

“The role of teachers is the same as well. We also need to brief the teachers from the beginning about the child’s needs. For example, if the child has certain characteristics. Then the teacher has to adjust a little, and if the child requires extra attention, that needs to be done.” (Participant 2).

Another participant emphasized that a teacher’s emotional expression serves as an important model for children. Teachers who display harshness or frequent anger tend to create a stressful learning environment, whereas those who demonstrate warmth and support promote trust and openness among students.

“The teacher needs to build a close relationship so that the child can accept what is being taught. When the teacher shows the right example, it may touch the child’s heart and help them absorb the values. But if the teacher keeps scolding, the child becomes stressed. Sometimes, just seeing the teacher at the door makes the child not want to enter the classroom anymore, because they already feel blocked.” (Participant 5).

These findings indicate that role-modelling and teacher training serve as leadership-mediated transmission mechanisms through which organisational values are translated into classroom practice. Instead of influencing children directly, preschool entrepreneurs shape behavioural

outcomes indirectly by regulating teacher conduct, emotional expression and instructional responses. This produces a cascading effect in which leadership norms influence teacher behaviour, which in turn shapes the emotional climate experienced by children. When teachers consistently model calmness, respect, and empathy, children internalise these behavioural scripts, reducing exposure to stress-inducing interactions and lowering the likelihood of emotional and behavioural escalation. High-performing entrepreneurs demonstrate intentional value alignment and structured teacher briefing, indicating that behavioural outcomes are strongest when modelling practices are systematically embedded rather than left to individual teacher discretion.

Subtheme 2: Recruiting and Guiding Quality Teachers

Participant emphasized that preschool entrepreneurs carry the responsibility of ensuring that teachers are carefully selected and adequately guided to work with children. Beyond academic qualifications, the right mindset and passion for early childhood education are viewed as essential.

One participant emphasized that recruitment must prioritize teachers who understand multiple aspects of child development and are motivated by more than financial gain.

“When asked about the role of a preschool entrepreneur, the first thing I would say is to look at who the teachers being hired are. They must understand physical, emotional, language, and social development, and have the right mindset to enjoy working with children, not just be motivated by money.” (Participant 8).

The same participant further highlighted that entrepreneurs themselves must reflect on their own intentions in running a preschool, as this directly influences the quality of care and education provided.

“The preschool entrepreneur themselves must decide whether their focus is mainly on money or on shaping children’s growth and character from an early age.” (Participant 8).

This suggests that recruitment and teacher guidance function as a value-alignment mechanism shaping the preschool’s emotional climate. By selecting teachers who understand child development and are intrinsically motivated, entrepreneurs minimise the likelihood of inconsistent or emotionally reactive practices that could contribute to behavioural instability. This deliberate hiring approach ensures that organisational values are consistently reflected in classroom interactions, thereby strengthening the emotional support children experience. Rather than addressing behavioural problems after they arise, entrepreneurs proactively influence outcomes through careful workforce selection. High-performing entrepreneurs are characterised by clear hiring standards and continuous reinforcement of shared values, indicating that sustained reductions in EBP depend on strategic human resource practices rather than informal staffing decisions.

Theme 4: Systemic Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Institutional Networking

Subtheme 1: Creating Family-Preschool Partnerships

Effective communication and collaboration with parents are seen as critical to understanding children's needs. As one participant described:

“We always need to communicate with parents. We also share things, like interesting TikTok videos in the group and sometimes parents appreciate it, saying, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize this before.’” (Participant 1).

Another participant highlighted the importance of building strong relationships with families.

“We want to create a sense of family values, so we also need to know the parents, take care of them, and maintain constant communication. We need to understand how the child is at home so that we can better support them at school.” (Participant 2).

At a deeper level, family-preschool partnerships function as an early identification and coordinated response mechanism for preventing EBP. Continuous communication with parents enables entrepreneurs and teachers to detect emerging concerns before they develop into more significant behavioural difficulties. By integrating insights from both home and school contexts, teachers can respond with greater sensitivity and precision. This shared monitoring reduces the risk of misinterpreting children's behaviours and facilitates timely intervention. High-performing entrepreneurs are characterised by structured and consistent parent engagement practices, suggesting that preventive outcomes are strengthened when communication systems are formalised rather than left to informal exchanges.

Subtheme 2: Organizing Parenting Programs and Workshops

Participant also identified the importance of educating parents through structured programs such as talks, workshops, and consultations. As one participant suggested:

“I feel the best way is to share with parents and to educate them, one way is by to consistently organize talks and invite parents to discussions.” (Participant 1).

In essence, parenting programmes and workshops serve as a preventive strategy that extends behavioural guidance beyond the classroom. By providing parents with knowledge about child development and emotional regulation, entrepreneurs help reduce differences in disciplinary approaches between home and school. This consistency strengthens shared behavioural expectations and lowers the risk of emotional confusion or behavioural escalation. Rather than responding only after problems arise, structured parent education builds parents' capacity to manage children's emotions effectively, thereby reducing the likelihood of persistent EBP. High-performing entrepreneurs are characterised by consistent and well-organised parent education initiatives, suggesting that preventive impact is stronger when engagement is structured rather than informal.

Subtheme 3: Building Networks with Child Experts

Finally, participant highlighted the importance of seeking support from external professionals, such as child psychiatrists, to better assist children and their families.

“Perhaps every kindergarten should invite child psychiatry experts to share with parents. There needs to be discussions, and having experts involved is important.” (Participant 1).

Building network with child experts serves as a structured early support mechanism within the preschool system. By involving professionals such as child psychiatrists, preschool entrepreneurs strengthen collaboration between the school and families, enhance parental understanding, and improve early identification of emotional and behavioural concerns. This coordinated interaction reduces delays in intervention and helps prevent minor difficulties from escalating into more serious behavioural problems. High-performing entrepreneurs distinguish themselves by proactively institutionalising these partnerships through regular engagement and knowledge-sharing initiatives, thereby extending support beyond classroom management and reinforcing an integrated support structure that promotes sustained reductions in EBP.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that numerous interconnected factors shape the emotional and behavioural development of children. These include the preschool environment, teaching practices, family involvement and professional support. These influences may be explained by the biopsychosocio-environmental model, which attributes EBP to interactions between children's biological, psychological, social and environmental factors.

High-quality preschools serve as important protective factors against EBP. Safe, well-organised and supportive environments help children regulate stress and develop emotional security. As a result, children are more likely to display positive behaviour, form healthy peer relationships and actively engage in learning (Oppermann et al., 2024; Martinsone et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020). In addition, the physical characteristics of the surroundings, such as light, colour, room layout and access to outdoor and green spaces have a strong impact on children's emotional well-being. These factors can reduce anxiety, hyperactivity and depressive symptoms, demonstrating that carefully planned environmental design is instrumental in the emotional health of young children (Kolosova & Nikoliuk, 2024; İnci & Akin, 2024; Liao et al., 2019; Mohamad et al., 2022).

The biological domain plays a role in EBP, with research showing that boys are more likely to exhibit hyperactivity and outward behavioural difficulties, while girls more often display inattention and internal emotional problems, although these patterns can vary across settings (Sun et al., 2024; Zen et al., 2019; Rahim et al., 2023). In addition, behavioural difficulties in boys may become more severe during adolescence, highlighting the importance of early identification and timely intervention (Sun et al., 2024).

From a psychological perspective within the biopsychosocio-environmental model, developmentally appropriate practices such as play-based and multisensory learning, storytelling and art activities support children's socio-emotional, cognitive and language development. These approaches also help identify early signs of behavioural risk (Dere, 2019;

Freeman, 2023; Deitcher et al., 2020). By strengthening children's coping strategies and self-regulation skills, these practices play an important role in reducing EBP.

The social domain is equally important and includes emotional support provided at home and in preschool. Supportive and authoritative parenting that employs empathy and emotion coaching helps children develop resilience, emotional control and creativity. In contrast, harsh or emotionally dismissive parenting can disrupt children's emotional regulation and increase the risk of behavioural problems, aggression and social withdrawal (Dong et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2024; Agbaria, 2020; Haverfield & Theiss, 2019; Lin et al., 2019). In preschool settings, relationships between teachers and children serve as secondary attachment systems that strongly influence socio-emotional development. Teachers who respond sensitively to children's emotions help build self-confidence, reduce behavioural difficulties and create inclusive classroom environments (Alexandersen et al., 2021; Wink et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2022; Lavy & Berkovich-Ohana, 2020). Additionally, gender-sensitive teaching approaches enable teachers to respond appropriately to externalising behaviours more commonly seen in boys and internalising behaviours more often observed in girls, ensuring fair and developmentally appropriate emotional support (Sun et al., 2024; Rahim et al., 2023; Álvarez-Voces & Romero, 2025).

In the environmental domain, strong leadership and positive teacher role modelling help build effective support systems around the child. Ongoing professional development equips teachers with the skills required for differentiated instruction, assessment and flexible teaching, enhancing their ability to address a wide range of emotional and behavioural needs (Cronin et al., 2022; Hatch & Clark, 2021; Nor et al., 2022). Additionally, recruiting and retaining well-qualified teachers who use varied teaching approaches, such as visual, auditory and kinaesthetic methods, supports children's engagement, confidence and emotional skill development. These approaches are particularly beneficial for children with attention challenges or special educational needs (Ediyanto, 2023; Gowda & D'Mello, 2019; Fathoni & Bakhtiar, 2023).

Systemic multi-stakeholder collaboration and institutional networking is essential for a comprehensive approach to preventing and reducing EBP. Strong partnerships between families and preschools, along with evidence-based parenting programmes, promote consistency across children's home and school environments and support emotional regulation, resilience and socio-emotional development (Alamos & Williford, 2019; Lambie et al., 2020; Havighurst et al., 2020; Pezeshki et al., 2020). When parenting interventions are aligned with preschool social-emotional learning programmes, combined benefits emerge which leads to improvements in children's self-control, cooperation and behavioural adjustment (Bierman et al., 2020; Hosokawa et al., 2023; Bailey et al., 2022). Collaboration with child specialists, such as psychiatrists and mental health professionals, further supports early identification and timely intervention, ensuring that children needs are addressed and strengthening preventive outcomes (Hudson et al., 2023; Thongseiratch et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that preschool entrepreneurs reduce EBP not through isolated actions, but by integrating four interrelated leadership domains which are nurturing learning environments, structured emotional regulation support, strategic organisational capacity building and systemic collaboration with external stakeholders. Creating nurturing

environments establishes emotional security, while empathic leadership provides structured emotional regulation that prevents stress-induced behavioural escalation. Strategic leadership further strengthens organisational capacity by embedding developmental sensitivity into policies, routines and professional development systems. Institutional networking extends support beyond the classroom through early identification and collaborative intervention.

The interaction among these domains forms a preventive organisational mechanism. Emotional safety increases children's receptivity to guidance, structured regulation support reduces behavioural dysregulation, and coordinated professional collaboration ensures timely responses to emerging concerns. High-performing entrepreneurs distinguish themselves by intentionally aligning these domains and embedding them into institutional systems, rather than relying on individual teacher initiative.

From a policy perspective, early childhood governance frameworks should formally recognise entrepreneurial leadership as a component of child mental health promotion. In terms of training, professional development programmes should integrate modules on empathic leadership, developmental alignment and multi-stakeholder collaboration. At the regulatory level, structured guidelines that encourage professional networking and organisational mental health strategies may strengthen early prevention systems within preschool settings.

Overall, this study positions preschool entrepreneurial leadership as a systemic preventive force that contributes to sustained improvements in children's emotional and behavioural well-being.

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