

Article

Sustaining Family Businesses through Business Incubation: An Africa-Focused Review

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Abstract: The influence of business incubation systems on family businesses in African economies has not been thoroughly investigated despite the potential contribution of family businesses to Africa's economic expansion and the attainment of development goals outlined in the Africa Development Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, this study investigates the potential benefits that family businesses in Africa can derive from engaging in business incubation. This study utilised an integrative literature review methodology to investigate the research question. Twenty-three peer-reviewed articles were systematically selected from the Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases using the following combination of phrases: "family business" and either "business incubation" or "business incubator". The findings suggest ways to create a mutually beneficial relationship between family businesses and business incubators to improve long-term sustainability, promote collaboration, facilitate knowledge transfer, and foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem. It also recognises challenges, such as cultural alignment in family businesses. Business incubators in Africa can improve the sustainability of family businesses, such as during the succession, by offering support, resources, and guidance. The South African experience is a role model for the rest of the continent, in this regard. Future research should broaden the sources beyond the three databases utilised, including non-peer-reviewed sources such as grey literature, and extend the focus beyond developing economies.

Keywords: family business; business incubation; business incubators; Africa; developing economies



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1. Introduction

The agency of business incubation systems to create sustainable family business ventures is a question barely answered in most African economies despite the proliferation of related entrepreneurship studies. While substantial research has emerged canvassing the importance of business incubation systems in entrepreneurship (Ojiagu and Ezemezuo 2023) and affirming the popularity of family businesses worldwide (Brophy et al. 2023), how to maximise business incubation artefacts to grow African family businesses is a topic that is yet to receive considerable attention (Egbetokun 2023). Saldaña et al. (2017) agree that the extant literature is quiet regarding the contribution of business incubators to the growth and development of family businesses. Given the critical role of entrepreneurship in Africa's sustainable development plans, we believe extending discourse to how family businesses benefit from incubation services cannot be delayed any longer. We believe the widely perceived benefits of business incubator systems can provide a timely boost to the

capabilities of family businesses to transform family households into centres of economic freedom in Africa. Moreover, utilising incubator resources to support family enterprises aligns with efforts to discover inventive methods for upholding the small business sector, as African nations pursue the objectives outlined in the Africa Development Agenda 2063, particularly Goals 1 (A High Standard of Living, Quality of Life and Well Being for All Citizens) and 4 (Transformed Economies) (African Union 2024) in sync with the 2015 global Sustainable Development Goals.

Several attributes define what constitutes a family business. It can be defined as an entity owned and or run by members of a single family. It could also be any business in which two or more family members of several generations are involved (Wilson et al. 2013), with the majority of ownership or control within the family (Barrios and González-Morales 2021). It is believed that family-owned businesses may be the oldest form of business organisation (Patel et al. 2012) and are valuable contributors to a nation's economy (Akinbola et al. 2020; Murithi and Beta 2021). As a business, they employ members of the family (Venter et al. 2005), contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of the country (Osunde 2017) and, largely, last longer as generations of family members are likely to sustain the business (Gagné et al. 2021). The sustainability of family businesses rests on several factors, including the commitment and unified leadership of the owners (Welsh and Raven 2006), which inadvertently brings stability, flexibility and versatility (Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2005). It is also believed that as the business matures, the ingenuity of generations of family members enriches the business (LeCounte 2022). These internal competencies arguably explain the common reasons why family businesses are sustained. Nonetheless, due to the family business's proclivity to hire family members, keeping costs down is often a priority (Gill and Kaur 2015) alongside their long-term vision and mission (Lumpkin et al. 2011).

Conversely, business incubators create supportive and conducive environments for new ventures by providing support throughout the business creation process (Vincent and Zakkariya 2021a; Zreen et al. 2019). The incubation strategy began being used in the United States of America in the 1950s as government intervention to curb consistent start-up failures (Zhou and Zondo 2023). It has been adopted globally to address small business mortality problems (Waweru et al. 2022) at the formative stages. They fulfil these tasks by furnishing entrepreneurs with essential resources, mentorship, and networking avenues to cultivate their enterprises (Meru and Struwig 2011; Msimango-Galawe and Hlatshwayo 2021). Other scholars reckon business incubators are indispensable catalysts for nurturing early stage start-ups, offering resources and services like office facilities, funding opportunities, mentorship programs, and networking events (Pettersen et al. 2015). It is also worth noting that incubator support can be virtual, with mentors able to provide remote services to entrepreneurs. In essence, business incubators are now poised to offer targeted and ongoing support to improve the operational sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures.

There is consensus among researchers that many businesses find it challenging to survive in formative years, with few small businesses making it past their third year of operation (Zhou and Zondo 2023). Business closure was even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a third of small businesses discontinuing. Among family businesses, COVID-19 is likely to have eliminated off social, financial and human capital through human deaths and suspension of operations. The scarcity and inefficiencies of government entrepreneurial support systems are well documented, suggesting the need for targeted interventions based on the incubation strategy to entrench sustainability capabilities in family businesses. Therefore, this paper derives its significance from the many calls of researchers (Deyanova et al. 2022; Hausberg and Korreck 2020; Hewitt and van Rensburg 2020) for further studies into the many other ways that business incubators can provide relevant support services to improve the longevity of businesses. Incidentally, while recent studies have investigated various aspects of African family businesses, such as their economic contribution, success factors, and unique challenges (Boateng 2021; Ernst et al. 2022; Mlotshwa 2022), there is still a significant gap in the literature on the intersection of

business incubation and family businesses in Africa. In that regard, this study will add to academic knowledge, provide beneficial information for business development practitioners and policymakers, and draw attention to improving family businesses' sustainability and growth. Within this context, it argues that leveraging business incubator support services are arguably hinged on acknowledging the numerous challenges that threaten small businesses' survival and viability.

Premised on the above, this study, therefore, aims to fill a scholarly deficit about how utilising business incubation resources can sustain family businesses in Africa by answering the questions below:

- (i) Can family businesses benefit from business incubation?
- (ii) And how might that happen?

The escalating withering of infrastructure and public utilities that shape and support socioeconomic development widens Africa's triple threat namely poverty, inequality and unemployment. As such, research efforts should drive towards family business–business incubator nexus realities for improved socioeconomic development of Africa.

The paper is organized as follows: Following the theoretical framework is background material that examines global family business dynamics, including the confluence between business incubation and family business in Africa. The review technique is explained, followed by our findings, which are presented as they pertain to the research questions. The conclusion highlights some implications and future research directions.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the assumption that emerging family businesses need to access incubation services support during their formative years. In fact, it is a common finding in entrepreneurship studies that many small businesses have a lower chance of survival and becoming a large business. In light of these realities, [Tembe \(2018\)](#) observes that the business failure concept has become the basic theoretical foundation of studies examining incubator-incubation performance and its impact on sustaining emerging businesses. Although it is defined in various ways, aspects such as business discontinuance, termination to prevent further losses, and failure to “make a go of it” are often used to determine business failure ([O’Kane 2017](#)). It follows that the business failure theory is applied to closely examine the issues that inhibit the survival and growth of family businesses and accelerate their premature demise. Nevertheless, the theory states that the efficiency of incubation services in assisting firms is demonstrated by verifiable sustainability metrics such as continued post-incubation profitability, among others.

The study capitalises on the resource dependency theory to explain the vulnerability of family businesses and further position the effects of incubator services. As its proponent, [Sheppard \(1995\)](#), explained, the theory's key assumption is that organisations survive by acquiring and maintaining resources from their environments. The counterargument to this idea is that resource scarcity causes entrepreneurs to fail, which explains why family firms must rely on business incubation resources during their formative years in order to remain in operation. In this sense, business incubation insulates start-ups from resource deficiencies that would otherwise accelerate their demise. Thus, we conceive the net effect of incubators as delaying the onset of start-up vulnerabilities that lead to business failure. In adopting this theory, we postulate that the long-term survival of the start-ups' post-incubation period depends on the degree to which entrepreneurs have established patronage within business networks and stakeholders, including family members, in the case of family business. The degree of deficiency of resources from the external environment may be exacerbated in Africa, a developing region. This would enhance demand for incubation services. Inevitably, the family businesses vulnerabilities suggest the need to implement turnaround strategies to improve viability.

According to [Hofer's \(1980\)](#) framework, firms can pursue cost reduction, revenue generation, asset reduction and operational efficiency improvement turnaround strategies. With cost reduction strategies, firms seek to drive operational costs down, for example, by

streamlining operations. Alternatively, they can sell off non-core assets to increase liquidity (asset reduction strategy) or enhance selling capabilities by exploring new markets and diversifying product offerings as part of the revenue generation turnaround strategy. Finally, firms can improve operational efficiency and leverage existing capabilities towards improved performance. However, in the context of small family businesses, we perceive the practicability of implementing these strategies to be challenging. It is viewed that revenue-generating recovery strategies may not work because small family enterprises cannot compete with large players for market share. Furthermore cost-reduction strategies may be ineffective due to a lack of economies of scale and scope. Asset-reduction strategies may be ineffective because small family enterprises cannot absorb losses from “fire sales” of key assets (Kane and Richardson 2002). Moreover, many of these firms utilise basic technological infrastructure with limited productive efficiency. Thus, in this study, we adopted Hofer’s (1980) frameworks to expose turnaround strategies that operationally viable firms can pursue and minimise reliance on business incubator services. These problems may be magnified in Africa, a developing region with inadequate infrastructure (Hearn 2013, 2014).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Global Family Business Dynamics

Family businesses are deeply rooted in family values. Thus, while launching a business can be perceived much as an individual choice, taking up a business career is often a function of the individual’s sociocultural context. This is because attitudes, motivation and perceptions are not solely intrinsic to the individual; they are shaped and constructed by exogenic factors such as family and social values (Hill et al. 2023). Exogenic factors are what Ajzen (2015) regards as subjective norms, which stem from a role model’s perceived expectations and behaviours, combined with a person’s motivation to conform to those expectations. In family contexts, exogenous and intrinsic factors are likely to give a family business a solid foundation rooted in motivation and loyalty to the family business. This is evident in China, where the Confucian rules and values that underpin Chinese society have a strong connection to business leadership (Liden 2012), and that might help a family-run firm succeed.

Moreover, the 2020 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report on family entrepreneurship shows that 75% of entrepreneurs and 81% of established business owners co-own and co-manage their businesses with family members in 48 countries (Kelley et al. 2020). Relatedly, 70 to 90% of the world’s GDP and significant revenue for nearly every country’s economy is attributed to family business (Gagné et al. 2021). Chami (2001) says that family businesses account for most of the private economies of developing countries, make up close to 40% of Fortune 500 companies in the United States of America, employ half of the labour force in the United Kingdom, and generate nearly two-thirds of the German GDP. Reports from Asian economies likewise reveal the dominance of family businesses, with 65% of family-owned and controlled businesses in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. In the United Arab Emirates, family businesses comprise about 90% of private companies, employ 80% of the nation’s workforce and contribute 60% of the country’s GDP (KPMG 2022; Samara 2021). Thus, family businesses contribute substantially to global economic activities.

3.2. Challenges Faced by Family Businesses

Like other entities, family businesses do not exist in a vacuum and encounter challenges that could be mitigated by proper management and leadership (Paderna et al. 2020). Among these challenges are bifurcation bias (Paderna et al. 2020), succession planning (LeCounte 2022) and risk management (Lo and Sugiarto 2021). Bifurcation bias refers to any preferential treatment afforded to a relative by an owner or manager based on their kinship ties, regardless of the former’s expertise and skills (Paderna et al. 2020). Family business owners tend to appoint family members and afford them special treatment compared to

non-family members (Verbeke and Kano 2012). Bifurcation bias could hamper business growth if left unremedied, especially when unqualified or untrained family members are hired (Gagliarducci and Manacorda 2020). However, this challenge is overcome by founders and successors through implementing merit-based hiring and promotion, transparent role allocation practices, skills training for family members, configuration and formalisation of human resources procedures, as well as rigorous and objective performance evaluation (Verbeke and Kano 2012).

Furthermore, family businesses struggle to deal with leadership succession issues, which occur when senior family business leaders either pass on or leave the business space earlier than expected, owing to the ever-changing business environment that requires a new perspective and stamina (Awosanya 2019). As a result, it is claimed that few family firms plan for leadership succession (LeCounte 2022), especially in Nigeria, where it leads to the demise of many family-run businesses (Okoh et al. 2022). The authors further revealed that globally, 70% of family businesses do not survive after the retirement and or death of first-generation owners, and 90% will not make it to the third generation, underlining the effect of succession issues on business performance. Succession refers to a change in ownership or management of a family business, through which the successor, coming from within or outside the owner's family, enters the industry, bringing new ideas and a different management style but not necessarily new capital to the company (Nordqvist et al. 2013). Its occurrence brings significant changes to SMEs about family relationships, firm management, and ownership structure. Consequently, researchers have different views about transgenerational succession.

Some studies have found that maintaining business control through transgenerational succession negatively impacts the family business's success (Umans et al. 2021). A case highlighted by McGovern (2007) is the decline of the Dunlop Tyre Company, where researchers noted that "the lack of a long-term strategic orientation design, including external factors, failed to sustain opulence and ownership across generations". Also, a longitudinal study by Gagné et al. (2021) on 89 Canadian family businesses found that the confidence of the successor and the incumbent's support perceptions predicted the successor's intrinsic motivation to take over the business. This, in turn, indicated whether the company was successfully transferred twelve years later (Gagné et al. 2021).

Other studies note that risk management demands pose threats to family business operations. Family business risk is defined by Web Finance Incorporated (2013) as the probability of inherent loss in business operations and the environment that harms the business' ability to provide investment returns. Research by the Family Enterprise Risk Index revealed that less than one-third of risk management plans for family businesses cover the risk to the family itself (Visser and van Scheers 2018). Visser and van Scheers (2018) expand on this by stating that failing to act on risk management results in significant losses that affect the family business's ability to fulfil its financial obligations to creditors and finance operations for business continuity.

3.3. The Business Incubation Family Business Nexus in Africa—An Overview of Family Business Dynamics

Evidence from many African countries underlines the importance of family businesses and incubation services. In East Africa, Murithi and Beta (2021) discuss the "Harambee spirit", a Kenyan national mantra representing a spirit of harmony, national inclusiveness, oneness, and tolerance. The Harambee spirit influences how Kenyan family businesses are managed and ultimately become successful and anchor the economy by contributing to the GDP and creating jobs and wealth. Relatedly, research found that business incubators have been pivotal in supporting the growth and development of family businesses. Momanji et al. (2023) found that business incubation positively impacted the performance of start-ups in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Kinya et al. (2018) also reported the performance evaluation processes that Kenyan incubators undergo to assess how they support entrepreneurial ventures. Likewise, other studies examined the impact of credit access

programs on the performance of women-owned micro and small enterprises incubated at the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI) (Waweru et al. 2022). In Rwanda, family business formation has its roots in a quest to find economic opportunities among the marginalised communities in a post-conflict era. Research claims that most family businesses in Rwanda were founded by oppressed families, mainly from the Tutsi population and those from the central and southern regions, who were barred from holding positions in government parastatals and the military (Rubyutsa et al. 2023). Government regulations also prevented them from purchasing land, so they only chose to go into business (Heinen 2023).

Accounts from West Africa similarly underscore the importance of family businesses and business incubators. The Nigerian Economic Intelligence Unit Report 2013 revealed that 52% of the 200 largest listed companies on the Nigerian stock exchange were family businesses, contributing to economic development, growth, and poverty reduction (Onuoha 2013). Onuoha (2013) further discussed the problems small family businesses face in Nigeria: poor infrastructure, competition from foreign businesses and multiple taxes. Nigerian family businesses lack an enabling environment, funding, and supportive policies (Ayobami et al. 2018). Onuoha (2013) highlighted the problems of professionalising family businesses in Southeast Nigeria and the need for more defined goals and strategic direction. About 89% of the surveyed family enterprises needed a clear mission and vision statement, 87.5% had not received formal training, and 77% had no knowledge or access to government policies to bolster entrepreneurship. Succession planning issues affect post-succession performance (Vincent and Zakkariya 2021b) and breed conflicts leading to family business closures (Okoh et al. 2022). Related research also delved into the significance of extended family in mobilising start-up capital to support family businesses (Bednarz et al. 2017) and the implementation of the Nigerian Business Incubation Programme (NBIP) as a government policy initiative to support entrepreneurs (Obaji et al. 2014). Similarly, research in Ghana explored the competitive advantage, business strategy, role of social networking relationships and strategic leadership in creating and sustaining competitive advantages in family businesses (Agyapong and Boamah 2013) and family business formation by female entrepreneurs (Boateng 2021). Boateng (2021) also canvassed the status of women in Ghana and policy initiatives to empower them, which is consistent with national endeavours to achieve gender equality (SDG5) and reduce inequalities (SDG10) in the social and economic arena.

In Southern Africa, the available literature indicates that in South Africa some of the largest and most dominant enterprises, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, are family-owned businesses, for example, Anglo American and Anglovaal, Altron, Liberty, Liberty Life, Pepkor, Pick n Pay, Rembrandt, Sage Life and Toyota SA (Venter and Farrington 2009). Findings from these African-focused studies demonstrate the positive impact of incubation services and the vulnerability of business start-ups in the absence of targeted entrepreneurial support. Overall, they suggest that as much as family businesses can mobilise resources from family and social networks (Murithi and Beta 2021) to survive, utilising incubator services remains desirable to grow the business.

4. Methodology

We executed an integrative literature review methodology to comply with the demands of the research questions and aimed to investigate the potential benefits of business incubation for family businesses and suggest how such benefits can be realised. According to Torraco (2005), integrative literature reviews are recommended where studies synthesise literature to develop new perspectives on a topic. This study aims to express a new perspective on business incubation and family business performance. In its design, an integrative literature review methodology sits on the spectrum of systematic and narrative literature reviews (Postlethwaite et al. 2023). It thus warrants developing a literature selection protocol consistent with its systematic review aspect. Systematic reviews prescribe a protocol-driven approach to collecting and analysing papers systematically fit for inclusion

in a study. They establish a verifiable, reproducible scientific path that validates sources of information used in a study. This way, bias can be minimised, and findings can be reliable (Snyder 2019). After meeting these systematic review preconditions, we then incorporated the narrative review aspects to discuss the literature findings and report new perspectives that emerged.

4.1. Step 1: Source Selection

The review was carried out on three databases to search for papers on business incubation and family businesses: Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar using (Harzing's 2010 software, Publish or Perish 8). These three are commonly used in social science and humanities research (Biresselioglu et al. 2020; Reale et al. 2018; Soaita et al. 2020). The Publish or Perish method has been used in over 500 studies (Harzing and Mijnhardt 2015), suggesting its widespread acceptance among researchers as an effective article extraction tool. Fatra et al. (2023) believe utilising Harzing's Publish or Perish service promotes the accessibility of research articles, hence improving the process of conducting literature searches.

4.2. Step 2: Search and Extraction Process

The present study used two phrases to search the selected databases. Ultimately, we searched for papers with the following phrases on either title or keywords: "family business" and "business incubator". Each phrase should appear on either the title or keywords. However, both phrases should appear in every article. In place of "business incubator", we also searched with the phrase "business incubation" to ensure all relevant studies are included. The review includes articles in the English language.

4.3. Step 3: Search and Extraction Process

Apart from removing duplicates, we made various inclusions and exclusions. Thus, the review only included peer-reviewed articles. As a result, we excluded conference proceedings, theses, books and book chapters. Furthermore, only freely accessible articles focused on African or developing countries were selected. Furthermore, Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2015) noted that, even as researchers follow protocol when applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, this too depends on researchers' subjective judgment and understanding of the topic.

4.4. Summary of the Sample Papers

The cross-section of the 23 papers, in Figure 1, analysed include 9 from Africa, 4 from Indonesia, 3 from India, 3 from Pakistan 2 from South America and one each from China and Jordan, consistent with the study's focus towards Africa and developing economies. While quantitative methods are predominantly utilised in most of the sampled papers, other methodologies used include qualitative approaches such as grounded theory, document analysis, case studies with interviews, observations, report reviews, semi-structured interviews and literature reviews. The 23 papers (see Table 1) emphasise the beneficial effects of business incubators and entrepreneurship education on students' intentions and entrepreneurial success. They also underscore the significance of family business experience and succession education, the important role of network resources, and the various strategies employed by in family enterprises. Apart from the above, they emphasise the need for customised and improved incubation services, the influence of cultural and gender norms on entrepreneurial identities, and the possibility of ecosystem development to promote entrepreneurship and inclusive growth. Suggestions for future research were varied such as the need for studies to focus on developing digitally focused business incubators and digital entrepreneurship education; expand its scope beyond individual incubators to improve generalisability; explore different ways to measure incubator services and examine the effects of gender dynamics and mentorship on succession planning and

leadership development in family businesses; and analyse demographic aspects of different family businesses.

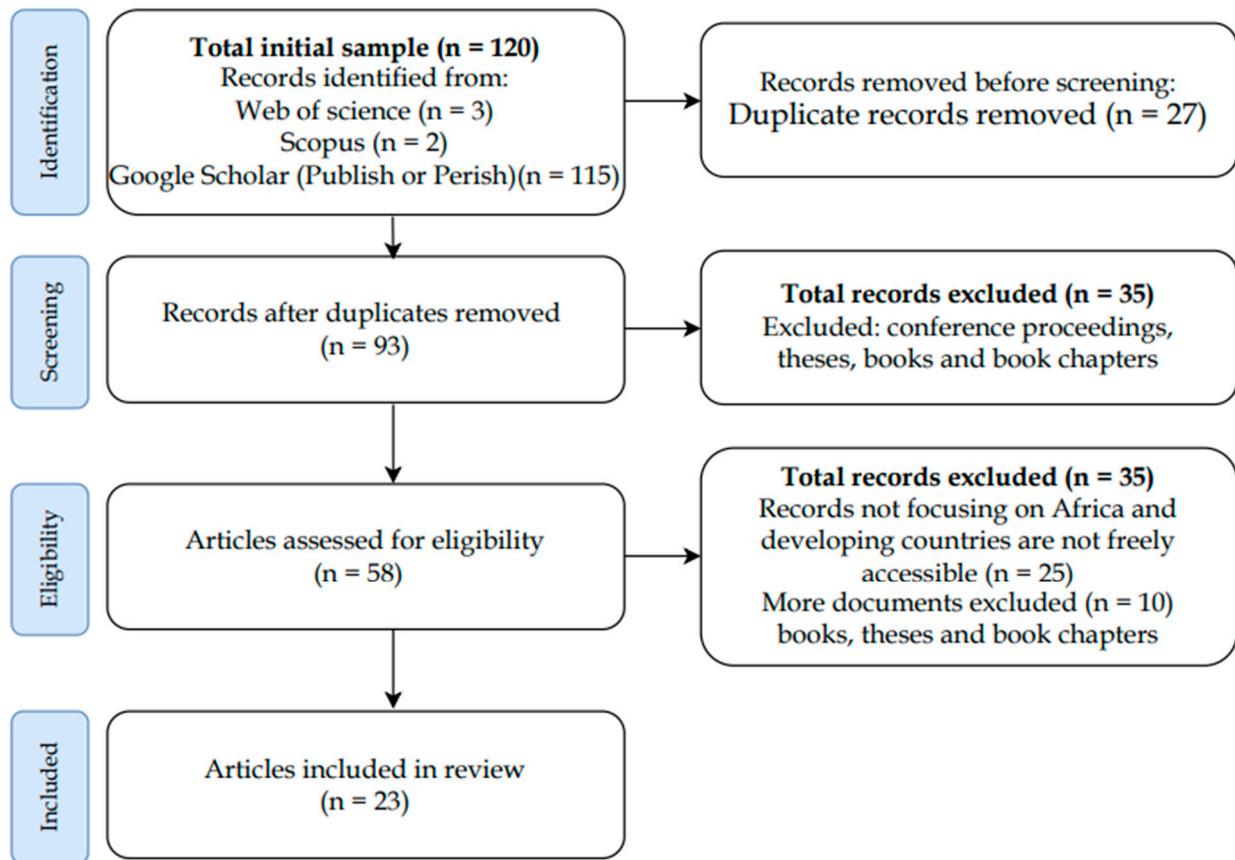


Figure 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the literature search.

The sampled papers make it clear that researchers should look for ways to support spin-offs and entrepreneurial networks, identify factors that make incubation successful both during and after a crisis, and improve business incubation practices to meet the needs of specific enterprises, with a focus on family-owned businesses’ succession planning and education.

Table 1. Summary of the sampled papers.

Study and Objective	Country of Focus	Methodology	Conclusion	Suggestions for Further Research
<p>Lose et al. (2020) Objective: to explore the concept of business incubation during the COVID-19 pandemic using grounded theory methodology and analysing sectoral briefs from the International Labour Organisation to identify key determinants of successful business incubation post-pandemic.</p>	South Africa	Document analysis	Business incubation success during and after the COVID-19 pandemic depends on six main factors: social dialogue, technological adoption, stakeholder engagement, collaborations, business re-purposing, and shock resilience. Social dialogue is considered a crucial element for business recovery and resumption after the pandemic.	Empirical investigations should be carried out to confirm the discovered factors that contribute to successful business incubation after the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, specific methods and interventions should be investigated to improve these factors in business incubators.
<p>Cullen et al. (2014) Objective: to establish whether the performance of the Seda Nelson Mandela Bay Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Incubator is in line with generally accepted performance standards, namely strategic alliance of the business (vision, mission and strategy), financing principles, management principles and human resource development and growth opportunities.</p>	South Africa	Qualitative /Quantitative	The incubator was aligned to generally accepted performance standards. Although, there is room for improvement in market alignment, incubate compliance and incubation periods.	This study was limited to a single case study. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct similar research studies at other incubators across the country to gather insight into their overall performance levels.
<p>Van der Spuy and Bornman (2023) Objective: to identify and understand the personal deficiencies of incubates within the incubator sector in the Northern Cape province, South Africa.</p>	South Africa	Semi-structured interviews	The deficiencies identified include a lack of (1) entrepreneurial experience, (2) entrepreneurial orientation, and (3) entrepreneurial skills.	The recommendations include conducting additional research to investigate hurdles that hinder successful incubation from the perspective of the incubates and to address shortcomings within South Africa’s incubation programmes.
<p>Mhlongo and Mzyece (2023) Objective: to explore the perceived economic value of Johannesburg-based, fintech-focused business incubators (Bis) and the business gains achieved from the activities of BI.</p>	South Africa	Qualitative	Business incubation is equally about assisting and developing start-ups and entrepreneurs as it is about the business gains that BIs extract from the process. this study contributes to our empirical understanding of BIs in emerging economies.	Future research could investigate how factors such as regulatory environments and funding sources, affected fintech BI operations.
<p>Akinbola et al. (2020) Objective: the objective of the study is to analyse the impact of interpersonal relationships on internationalisation and assess the influence of succession planning on internationalisation in family businesses in Nigeria.</p>	Nigeria	Quantitative	Strong interpersonal relationships enhance internationalisation success in family firms. However, succession planning may not have a direct positive impact on internationalisation.	It is advisable to investigate the intricacies of succession planning in family businesses and consider other aspects that could impact the success of foreign expansion, such as market conditions or legal frameworks.

Table 1. Cont.

Study and Objective	Country of Focus	Methodology	Conclusion	Suggestions for Further Research
<p>Ojiagu and Ezemezu (2023) Objective: to investigate the relationship between cooperative business mentorship, market intelligence services, capital supply services, and entrepreneurial performance among cooperative members in Imo State, Nigeria.</p>	Nigeria	Quantitative	Providing mentorship, market intelligence services, and capital supply services for cooperative company ideas has a favourable impact on the entrepreneurial performance of cooperative members in Imo State.	Our recommendation: a longitudinal study that could provide deeper insights into these services' sustainability and long-term impact is recommended.
<p>Oluwafunmilayo et al. (2018) Objective: to assess the impact of prior family business background on entrepreneurial intention, mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy, desirability, feasibility, and attitudes towards business start-ups.</p>	Nigeria	Quantitative	Family business experience has a substantial impact on entrepreneurial intention by affecting entrepreneurial self-efficacy, desirability, feasibility, and attitudes towards business start-ups.	Our recommendation: a cross-cultural analytical study can also be conducted to improve the generalisability of findings regarding the mediating effects of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, desirability, feasibility, and attitudes towards entrepreneurial intentions.
<p>Okoh et al. (2022) Objective: investigating the effect of succession education on family-owned business succession in small and medium-scale enterprises in Nigeria.</p>	Nigeria	Literature review	Succession education is vital for improving the effectiveness of family-owned business succession in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Factors such as education level, on-the-job training, mentorship, and openness to learning have a substantial impact on the process.	Family-owned businesses' education, succession planning and implementation were considered from a quantitative perspective.
<p>Momanyi et al. (2023) Objective: to establish the influence of business incubation on the performance of start-ups in Nairobi City County, Kenya.</p>	Kenya	Quantitative	The study revealed that business incubation had a significant influence on the performance of start-ups in Nairobi City County.	Researchers should also examine the impact of other forms of business incubators, such as university-affiliated ones, on start-ups' performance for comparative reasons.
<p>Hasan et al. (2021) Objective: to analyse the influence of entrepreneurship education within family businesses in the culinary sector on entrepreneurial motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Indonesia	Quantitative	Entrepreneurship education in family enterprises plays a vital role in boosting entrepreneurial drive, both directly and indirectly, by influencing entrepreneurial mindset, especially in the face of problems like the COVID-19 epidemic.	It is advisable to study the lasting impacts of entrepreneurship education on family businesses outside of the pandemic and examine the efficacy of various approaches to entrepreneurship education in promoting entrepreneurial drive and resilience in family businesses.

Table 1. Cont.

Study and Objective	Country of Focus	Methodology	Conclusion	Suggestions for Further Research
<p>Irwansyah et al. (2021) Objective: to investigate the factors influencing students' entrepreneurial intentions, particularly focusing on the moderating effects of family business ownership background and the entrepreneurial university environment.</p>	Indonesia	Quantitative	Perceived desirability has a positive effect on entrepreneurial intention, while perceived feasibility does not significantly impact the intention for entrepreneurship. The moderating effects of family business background and the entrepreneurial university environment were found to be insignificant.	It is advisable to investigate other elements that could impact students' entrepreneurial intents, like cultural aspects or personal motives, and to conduct longitudinal research to evaluate the consistency and endurance of entrepreneurial goals over time. Studying students' entrepreneurial achievements and success rates from diverse origins and circumstances could offer significant insights.
<p>Tricahyono et al. (2018). Objective: to determine the most appropriate model that is competent to provide an accurate depiction of the role of a business incubator in cultivating the innovation of startups during the incubation process.</p>	Indonesia	Case study–interviews, observation and report review	Current models, such as the Bergek–Norrman Model and Business Model Canvas (BMC) do not effectively illustrate the learning process and value creation in incubators like Bandung Techno Park. As a result, a new model dubbed Incubator Canvas for Innovation (IC4I) has been created to solve these shortcomings.	Future research suggestions include performing a Delphi study to assess stakeholder consensus on IC4I, analysing various incubator types through case studies to enhance the model, and consistently enhancing the model to boost its impact on startup development and global economic well-being.
<p>Sulistiyowati (2021) Objective: to assess the role of business incubators.</p>	Indonesia	Qualitative	According to the study's findings, business incubators successfully encourage students' interest in starting their businesses and assist entrepreneurship education.	To investigate the creation of digitally oriented business incubators and digital entrepreneurship education to tackle problems like sales distribution and financial management.
<p>Muralidharan et al. (2021) Objective: to promote entrepreneurship among farmers in the agrarian sector through initiatives like farmer-producer organisations and business incubations, aimed at doubling farm income and addressing challenges faced by farmers in India.</p>	India	Document analysis	Business incubation initiatives in the agrarian sector are crucial for fostering entrepreneurship among farmers, enhancing their livelihoods, and assuring inclusive growth and global competitiveness in the plantation industry.	Our recommendation: there is also a need to examine challenges faced by FPOs in different agricultural contexts in India.
<p>Vincent and Zakkariya (2021a) Objective: to investigate the impact of business incubation on the absorptive capacity and innovation speed of startups in India.</p>	India	Quantitative	Business incubation procedures greatly improve startups' ability to absorb knowledge, resulting in faster innovation and commercialisation of technological goods.	It is advisable to investigate further the particular elements in business incubation that impact absorptive capacity and invention pace and analyse how these results may differ among other industries or regions.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Study and Objective	Country of Focus	Methodology	Conclusion	Suggestions for Further Research
<p>Vincent and Zakkariya (2021b) Objective: to investigate how business incubation services contribute to overcoming challenges faced by technology start-ups and how they impact start-up performance.</p>	India	Quantitative	Business incubation services positively influence start-up performance, emphasising the significance of tailored and enhanced incubation services.	Future research should identify the characteristics that incubator managers should modify, enhance, increase, and adjust to meet the individual needs of incubated enterprises.
<p>Al-Damen (2021) Objective: To identify the level of services provided by the business incubators and their impact on business success</p>	Jordan	Quantitative	The study concluded that recipients found business incubators' support practices to be highly valuable, with a statistically significant impact on business success. Networking support services were considered the most beneficial, followed by infrastructural support services.	It is important to broaden the scope outside Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation business incubators to enhance generalisability and to investigate alternative metrics of business incubator services and business performance from the viewpoint of other stakeholders.
<p>Gillani et al. (2022) Objective: to evaluate the impact of business incubation centres on entrepreneurial intention among university students in Pakistan, focusing on the role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy.</p>	Pakistan	Quantitative	Business incubation centres have a considerable impact on the entrepreneurial intentions of Pakistani university students, especially when measures are taken to improve students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy.	Investigate techniques and treatments in company incubation centres that promote entrepreneurial self-efficacy in students and examine their long-term effects on entrepreneurial success after graduation.
<p>Iqbal et al. (2020) Objective: to investigate the factors influencing entrepreneurial intention among students in South Asian developing countries, specifically focusing on the role of entrepreneurial knowledge as moderated by the theory of planned behaviour.</p>	Pakistan	Quantitative	Entrepreneurial knowledge and attitude have a favourable influence on entrepreneurial intention in students, while subjective norms and perceived behavioural control do not significantly affect entrepreneurial intention, emphasising the moderating effect of entrepreneurial knowledge.	Future research should consider using diverse models, integrating multiple data sources to minimise biases, examining the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model in conjunction with ecological and attitudinal factors, and exploring mediating mechanisms to better understand the connections between exogenous and endogenous variables.
<p>Zreen et al. (2019) Objective: to empirically investigate the impact of business incubators and internship programs on students' entrepreneurial intentions in the Pakistani context.</p>	Pakistan	Quantitative	Business incubators and internship programmes positively influence students' entrepreneurial intents, underscoring the relevance of practical entrepreneurial education in developing entrepreneurial awareness and abilities.	Future research should focus on using larger and more diverse samples from various geographical locations, including additional variables like finance availability and personality traits, utilising longitudinal data for more accurate cause-and-effect analysis, using probability sampling methods, and investigating gender differences in entrepreneurial behaviours and intentions, particularly in small firms.

Table 1. Cont.

Study and Objective	Country of Focus	Methodology	Conclusion	Suggestions for Further Research
<p>Zhao and Getz (2008) Objective: to investigate and understand the characteristics, goals, and cross-cultural differences of rural family business owners in developing and developed countries within the tourism and hospitality sector.</p>	China	Quantitative	<p>Family business owners in the tourism and hospitality sector exhibit distinct characteristics and objectives in developing and developed countries, emphasising the necessity for further research on barriers to entrepreneurial involvement, the impact of lifestyle entrepreneurs, and the incorporation of relevant theoretical frameworks for more thorough comprehension.</p>	<p>Future research should investigate the business start-up process, including generating business ideas and mobilising resources. It should also survey the general public to understand the demographic characteristics and social networks of small/family business owners. Additionally, subjective indicators like life satisfaction should be included in performance measures, and theories from other disciplines should be introduced to enhance the theoretical framework in family business research within tourism and hospitality.</p>
<p>Lozano (2017) Objective: to identify the essential conditions needed to establish an ecosystem conducive to the emergence of spin-off enterprises from family businesses.</p>	Colombia	Case study	<p>Establishing an ecosystem with five fundamental components—namely the family, the family business, the project committee, the environment, and the spin-off enterprises—can cultivate a conducive environment for the development of new businesses stemming from family enterprises, with the possibility of additional elements augmenting this ecosystem.</p>	<p>It is recommended to investigate issues concerning regulatory backing for spin-off businesses, techniques for assessing spin-off proposals, enhancing organic spin-off instances, overcoming barriers to planned spin-offs, transferring proprietary knowledge, securing financial backing, maximising resource allocation, utilising family outings for brainstorming, and creating official agreements to aid spin-off growth from parent corporations.</p>
<p>Barrios and González-Morales (2021) Objective: to characterise Venezuelan Family Businesses (FB) as essential contributors to regional development in Latin America.</p>	Venezuela	Quantitative	<p>Venezuelan family businesses play a crucial role in tackling particular economic issues, exploiting indigenous resources, and promoting a cohesive community, all of which aid regional development.</p>	<p>It is advisable to analyse the demographics of Venezuelan enterprises, particularly Family Businesses, emphasising company operations and employment generation potential in various business scales and sectors, to obtain a thorough insight into their influence on the economy and society.</p>

5. Findings

5.1. Can Family Businesses Benefit from Business Incubation?

Although the business incubator idea is popular, empirical studies on their impact have returned mixed results demonstrating positive, negative and no impact. This subsection reviews arguments supporting each of these positions.

[Rathore and Agrawal \(2021\)](#) have decried a lack of exact science on how and what to measure to make credible sense of the business incubator effect on emerging businesses. Their review showed that researchers have diverse and uncoordinated parameters, such as jobs created by firms, firms graduated from incubators, completing a business plan and starting of production, among others, to measure business incubator performance, resulting in contentious opinions. It therefore appears that how incubators impact business performance is still an unsettled debate.

Literature findings suggest that some family businesses are endowed with resources and knowledge capabilities comparable to what incubators can offer. In some cases, family businesses assume the role of incubators for entrepreneurial members of a family. [Lozano \(2017\)](#) argued that such members could use the family business as incubators, given their ability to provide the necessary business support. Given these capabilities, it is difficult for some family business owners to appreciate what they can gain from seeking accommodation in business incubators.

[Lozano's \(2017\)](#) contention is that incubation may not be necessary for family businesses, considering family structures' inherent human, educational, capital, and strong community relationships. Arguably, many of the resource business incubators provided are found in family structures (such as finance, human skills, and succession plans), with potential linkages with incubators likely to bring conflicts, inconsistencies and duplication of resources. Moreover, the fact that family businesses have better prospects of success without support compared to other types of start-ups lends credence to adequate resource outlays.

[Barrios and González-Morales \(2021\)](#) made several observations that challenge the notion that business incubation may benefit family businesses. Firstly, they stated that a family business is not synonymous with being a small business. Secondly, in tandem with [Okoh et al. \(2022\)](#), they stressed that its priority is generational continuity instead of growth objectives simulated through incubation. Importantly, family business mobilisation secures lifelong resource support from stakeholder communities through relationship management. Moreover, it is doubtful whether business incubator experiences can adequately diffuse among all family members to make a meaningful contribution to the running of the business. In this sense, there is a misalignment between the incubator's purposes and the family business's strategic orientations.

Considering that many of the business support artefacts provided by business incubators lack gender neutrality and, at best, perpetuate a male-gendered entrepreneurship culture, incubators are ill-suited to address major challenges facing family businesses, such as female succession issues ([Brophy et al. 2023](#)), family conflicts and disputes impacting generational continuity and leveraging business identity with the local community ([Barrios and González-Morales 2021](#)), particularly in family businesses. [Basco et al. \(2021\)](#) observed that family businesses are economic and social actors with historical roots in certain places. This suggests that family businesses require culturally and socially sensitive tailored business incubation conforming to the value-driven nature of family business practices.

Some evidence equally suggests that family businesses can benefit from incubator services. It is claimed that incubators help entrepreneurs gain credibility ([Waweru et al. 2022](#)) and build credible networks that help firms leverage internal and external network resources for business success. Several researchers have also claimed that business incubators serve as vehicles for small business development ([Ojiagu and Ezemezuo 2023](#)). Evidence shows great interest in upscaling incubator programs to support entrepreneurship ventures. South Africa is among many developing nations that have adopted the incubation system as a cornerstone of supporting the small business sector, regarded as a role model for the remainder of the continent ([Cullen et al. 2014](#)). The modus operandi establishes

support systems that offer resources, guidance, and overall support to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic development.

5.2. *And How Might That Happen?*

Business incubators provide access to business training, connections with experts and investors, funding, and networking opportunities that strengthen family businesses' internal capabilities anchored in family resources and relationships (Vincent and Zakkariya 2021a). The support they receive regarding refining business models, marketing strategies, and navigating legal frameworks reduces business failure incidences. Access to incubator support, particularly human capital development, enables family businesses to build a legacy of diversified knowledge capital across all business functional units, from human resources to marketing and accounting, strengthening internal management capacity. In this way, business incubation contributes to family business' long-term success.

It is arguable that successful implementation of business incubator approaches to family businesses must take cognisance of the stature of family businesses as an economic, family and often community context, considering that family businesses are linked to society by personal relations with extended families in Africa (Murithi and Beta 2021). We argue that the discourse linking family businesses and business incubators lies in the potential synergy between the unique characteristics of family businesses and the support structures offered by incubators. Connecting these two concepts offers the following as opportunities to sustain family businesses through business incubation.

5.2.1. Longevity and Sustainability

Family businesses are known to have a long-term outlook that prioritises generational sustainability (Neffe et al. 2020). This viewpoint is consistent with the nurturing environment that business incubators provide, through which new businesses can flourish over time. Incubators offer a supportive environment that promotes long-term sustainability (Akanle and Omotayo 2020). Their various services—mentorship, office space, and technology—foster an atmosphere favourable to the growth of a business.

Family businesses tend to be driven by the desire to leave a lasting legacy (Cater and Young 2018). Collaboration with a business incubator can contribute to the long-term viability of larger business communities. Thus, family businesses can help shape the future of their industries by nurturing start-ups. Within the discourse on long-term viability, a common focus of business incubators is promoting innovation, which is a critical driver of long-term success for any business. Family businesses learn high-level business practices through partnerships with business incubators, ensuring longevity.

Considering family businesses' difficulty with succession planning (LeCounte 2022), they can explore new business options through start-ups and diversify their interests by participating in a business incubator, which may help reduce the dangers associated with relying too much on pre-existing business models.

5.2.2. Collaboration and Resource Sharing

While family businesses can benefit from networks, finance, and expertise within the family, in a business incubator context, these resources can be shared with start-ups to build a win-win partnership. Incubators, however, benefit significantly from meaningful partnerships because resources can be shared among partners (Breivik-Meyer et al. 2020). In this regard, we propose that family-run businesses can improve the incubator environment by providing start-ups with invaluable resources, knowledge, and mentorship.

5.2.3. Alignment of Values and Culture

Families run businesses with a strong sense of responsibility and a distinctive culture. These tenets can benefit the business incubator environment by encouraging cooperation, integrity, and trust. Business incubators benefit from the wide-ranging values and cultures that businesses bring to the table (Chirico and Nordqvist 2010). With a strong sense of

responsibility and values, family businesses can help create a pleasant and supportive environment within the incubator.

5.2.4. Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning

Family businesses can impart their acquired expertise and experience to the upcoming generation of entrepreneurs by participating in a business incubator. Through mentorship initiatives, business incubators frequently concentrate on knowledge transfers. Family-run businesses can be extremely valuable in incubators as mentors and supporters of new ventures because of their extensive knowledge.

Family businesses generally have a wealth of industry-specific skills and knowledge-spanning generations (Sirmon and Hitt 2003). Start-ups in a business incubator can benefit from this knowledge by providing insights, guidance, and essential industry connections (Hsueh et al. 2023). Family businesses can provide start-ups with vital resources in a business incubator because of their established networks and stable finances. This could involve financial support, opportunities for joint ventures, mentorship, and access to distribution outlets. This enhances their resource-sharing and collaboration capabilities.

5.2.5. Networking and Community

Family businesses frequently have a strong relationship with the areas in which they operate. By participating in business incubators, they can increase the scope of their networking and community involvement. However, incubators offer opportunities for community development and networking. Family-run businesses can strengthen the incubator's sense of community by virtue of their ties to and interest in the community. In summary, the complementary characteristics of family businesses and business incubators theoretically link the two. In a business incubator setting, the perseverance, commitment to principles, and resourcefulness of family enterprises can make a big difference to the viability and success of start-ups.

5.2.6. Enhancement of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Family businesses frequently exhibit entrepreneurial spirit (Porfirio et al. 2020). They are often motivated by long-term vision and the desire to leave a legacy. When a family firm collaborates with a business incubator, it adds to the entrepreneurial ecosystem by contributing to its unique viewpoint, experience, and resources to support new initiatives. As a result, business incubators should be intended to stimulate innovation and help early stage businesses develop (Mhlongo and Mzyece 2023). Incubators can tap into established networks, industry expertise, and financial resources by partnering with family businesses, creating a more robust environment for developing and scaling entrepreneurs.

Adaptability to market trends is a factor in an organisation's long-term vision and sustainability (Miceli et al. 2021). Businesses operating outside business incubators are usually flexible and able to adjust to changes in the market. Agility can help family businesses by allowing them to absorb new ideas and incorporate them into their operations.

The potential for mutual benefits between family businesses and business incubators provides a practical basis for their partnership. Family businesses offer financial stability, industry experience, and a long-term outlook; business incubators, nonetheless, offer start-up growth support, a platform for innovation, and access to a diverse network. Together, they can establish a dynamic ecosystem that supports sustainability, adaptation, and entrepreneurship.

5.3. Overall Assessment for and against Business Incubation in Family Businesses

Although business incubation can certainly be advantageous for family businesses, African nations should carefully evaluate its suitability for their specific circumstances. Various nations adopt diverse policy positions regarding business assistance and their approach to addressing societal disparities. For example, in Kenya, the government introduced the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI) in July 2006

under the Ministry of Industrialisation (Waweru et al. 2022) and the implementation of the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA) as a government policy initiative to support entrepreneurs in Nigeria (Obaji et al. 2014). Therefore, it is imperative for governments to endorse policies that foster gender equality, particularly in business settings where disparities in participation are a pressing issue. Additionally, different African countries offer varying levels of business support services. In countries with limited business support policies, the collaboration between family businesses and business incubation is particularly advantageous. Furthermore, synergy is crucial for family businesses to effectively diversify their portfolios, as they are known for dedicating concentrated efforts to their ventures (Cheng 2014).

There are advantages and disadvantages to the family business–business incubator relationship. First, family businesses gain by having access to resources, having the chance to learn from the different service providers connected to the business incubator, and having funding and funding-related information available to them. The concern of losing autonomy on the part of the family business, which runs the danger of relying on the business incubator for various things, is one of the disadvantages of partnering with a business incubator. Conflicts between cultures and rival businesses that gather at the business incubator are other issues.

Nonetheless, South Africa is steadfast in its endeavours to leverage business incubator services to support entrepreneurship ventures, including family businesses, to achieve social and economic development objectives. The government promotes expanded reach through the Small Enterprise Development Agency network countrywide (Lose et al. 2020), in addition to private sector incubators such as fintech-focused business incubators (Mhlongo and Mzyece 2023). Providing such a variety of incubator services demonstrates the increased importance of incubator services in the country and positions South Africa as a potential role model for the rest of the continent. Therefore, it is arguable that South African experiences justify calls to business entrench incubator support networks in African economies to strengthen small business sector performance and support family businesses.

6. Discussion

Overall, evidence indicates that family businesses face challenges that can lead to their downfall if unresolved. Several studies show that family businesses can reap significant benefits from using business incubators to survive and improve their performance. It has been demonstrated that business incubators enhance firm performance and survival rates (Gstraunthaler 2010). For businesses to successfully incubate, they offer a strategic intervention approach that includes business aid and monitoring (Al-Damen 2021). Business incubators positively impact economic growth, business competitiveness, and innovation and technology transfer (Zreen et al. 2019).

The application of business incubators is especially pertinent to family-owned businesses. Business incubators can provide family-owned businesses confronting succession with tools and knowledge in the field of family business (Saldaña et al. 2017). Business incubators support family-owned businesses in managing succession (Kamener et al. 2018). Additionally, the coding of family and business owners' life stories indicated important factors that may help or hinder the succession plan, suggesting that business incubators can offer insightful advice (Solomon et al. 2011).

Essentially, family businesses must investigate and take advantage of the opportunities provided by business incubators to secure their long-term success and expansion. In particular, business incubators can significantly improve family firm' performance and survival rates during crucial stages like succession and launching by offering vital support, direction, and resources. In order to secure their continued success and expansion, family businesses should carefully evaluate and seize the opportunities provided by business incubators.

A focused business incubation strategy for supporting family businesses has been argued in this paper as a panacea for family business's continued existence. Realising this necessitates an all-encompassing strategy that includes institutional restructuring,

governance, and policy improvements. Collaboration among governments, businesses, and other stakeholders is vital to creating an atmosphere that fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable growth for businesses. But more importantly, noting the ever-increasing deterioration of infrastructure and public utilities, it becomes instructive that more research effort should be geared towards family business–business incubator nexus realities for improved socioeconomic development of Africa to deal with Africa’s triple threat namely poverty, inequality and unemployment.

7. Future Research Propositions

The limitation of this study is noted in three aspects. Firstly, the utility of three databases—Scopus, WOS, and Google—no doubt yielded useful results, but they were inconclusive. Thus, future studies may consider more databases to widen the size of the sample papers. Furthermore, the limitations include the exclusion of non-peer-reviewed scientific sources (Reale et al. 2018). We partly employed the integrative review methodology to steer clear of bias, which is prevalent in more conventional methods of literature evaluation. We also recognize that the researcher and the purpose of the study determine which databases to use for a systematic examination, thereby allowing for some bias. It is acknowledged that the grey literature frequently addresses societal issues (Baxter et al. 2020; Chakraborty et al. 2021; Christensen et al. 2022). We equally acknowledge that some of the 23 studies are not focused on Africa, which limits the generalisability of this paper. Lastly, the dearth of studies concurrently focusing on family businesses and business incubators in Africa led to a small sample size and this study recognises this literature gap. Subsequent investigations may broaden the range of sources.

Furthermore, the sample papers use data from only three African countries: Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. These are all Anglophone countries and members of the Commonwealth. Hence, they would have many shared institutional features (Ball et al. 2000). The results may have limited generalisability to other African countries that were colonized by continental European powers. It is also acknowledged that the African continent is made of several regional realities, each one expressing a unique mixture of context-specific attributes (Raduzzi and Massey 2019) including culture which potentially affect entrepreneurship dynamics. For example, communities in northern Africa adhere predominantly to Islam and those in Southern Africa largely to Christianity, thus entrenching differing religious dimensions towards entrepreneurship behaviours. A consideration that reduces this limitation is that the three countries represent diverse geographical regions of the continent. South Africa is from Southern Africa; Kenya is from East Africa and Nigeria is from West Africa.

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