

EXEMPLARY EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: THE VIEWS OF EXCELLENCE SELECTED PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

Dr. Yael Cohen Azaria

Ashkelon Academic College, Israel

ABSTRACT

One of the key factors determining the success of preschool education is the quality of the teaching staff. Preschool teachers (PTs) play a significant role in developing children's cognitive and academic skills, resilience, social skills, positive self-image, and overall well-being during their first years of life prior entering to school. The main goal of this study was to examine the perceptions of PTs recognized for their excellence as educational leaders, regarding the characteristics of exemplary PTs as educational leaders.

The study employed a qualitative paradigm of data collection and analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed thematically. Participants were 15 PTs selected by a committee from the Israeli Ministry of Education for their exceptional educational leadership.

The study findings revealed five main characteristics of exemplary PT educational leaders: (1) loving and caring for preschoolers, (2) fostering collaboration and strong relationships with the preschool community, (3) educating for values, (4) promoting meaningful and experiential learning, (5) personalizing learning through dialogue with parents.

There is a clear dearth in scholarly literature dealing with the characteristics of exemplary PTs as educational leaders in early childhood education. This study is the first to reveal these characteristics from the perspective of PTs recognized for their excellence as educational leaders by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

Keywords: preschool, preschool teacher, educational leaders, exemplary leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the preschool teacher (PT) in children's lives is of paramount importance in all areas of the child's development in the first years of life. The PT's role is significant in building the children's resilience, social skills, life skills, values, positive self-image, well-being and in developing their cognitive and academic skills [1]. The PT is expected to provide the children with skills that enable them to adapt to educational frameworks, regulation of activities, ways of communicating with other children, learning skills and the ability to cope emotionally with difficulties [2]. The preschoolers spend most of the day with their PT, who is responsible for all their activities and is expected to prepare them for their transition to primary school. Because of the intensive time spent together, the PT-child relationship has a significant influence on children's cognitive, emotional,