

## CHAPTER 5

# Leadership Responsibilities of Early Childhood Directors in Palestine from the Directors' Viewpoint

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### Abstract

This chapter discusses early childhood education (ECE) directors' leadership in Palestinian ECE in a time when Palestine reformed and developed its ECE system. Specifically, the study sets out to investigate what key leadership responsibilities were experienced by Palestinian early childhood directors. The lack of studies dealing with ECE leadership in the Palestinian context shows the need for a unified consciousness of leadership. This chapter adds to this challenge, and it is

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hoped that novel researched-based knowledge might also add to the understanding of leadership responsibilities internationally. The study belongs to the Norwegian Partnership Programme for Global Academic Cooperation (NORPART) project Developing Teacher Education in Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education and Early Elementary Schools in Palestine and Norway, in which researchers from Palestine and Norway investigated ECE leadership as one selected topic. This chapter builds on empirical data from a quantitative questionnaire (N = 166) administered to a purposeful representative sample of ECE directors from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The results show the wide range of leadership responsibilities that ECE directors perceive in their daily work. Using the theoretical framework of leadership as function (Adizes, 1991), we found that ECE directors in Palestine rank responsibilities to children highest. Even though leadership responsibilities related to administration were ranged as lowest, this category contains most areas of responsibility. Moreover, the results highlight the directors' role and duties in securing and safeguarding the organisation's goals as core responsibilities. The results make a new contribution to understanding and developing the professional role in order to strengthen ECE leadership and be more effective and dynamic in Palestinian ECE during a time of significant expansion.

**Keywords:** ECE directors, leadership, responsibilities, everyday leadership, leadership functions

## Introduction

With the increasing interest in leadership responsibilities, the work of early childhood education (ECE) directors is evolving rapidly in Palestine at the same time as early childhood leadership in Palestine has not been a well-researched area. Abou-Dagga, El-Holy, Subuh, Al-Tahrawy, and Al-Sheikh Ahmed (2007) have evaluated the quality in ECE in Gaza. They highlight a significant need to emphasise the role of ECE leadership, as ECE directors have a significant role in ensuring the quality of early childhood education. To provide quality ECE, directors need to engage in both human resource and administrative and pedagogical leadership functions, dividing their time between the tasks that fall within these functions (Douglass, 2019; Modise, 2019; Strehmel et al., 2019). The aim of this chapter is to discuss ECE directors' leadership in Palestinian ECE in a time when Palestine reforms and develops

its ECE system. Specifically, the chapter sets out to investigate what key leadership responsibilities are being experienced by Palestinian early childhood directors and thus add novel research-based knowledge to the field.

## Background

In 2017, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education published guidelines for ECE centres (Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2017b), and there has been a significant quantitative expansion of centres over the last ten years. There are 2017 ECE centres in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip), which were attended in 2018/19 by 148,253 children (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Attendance at ECE centres is offered to children aged 3 years and 7 months prior to the commencement of compulsory education at basic school (at the age of 6 years). The two-year early education stage is not compulsory, but the new Law of Education (Law 8, year 2017) stipulates that one year of early education (KG2, sometimes called Grade 0) is compulsory (Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2017a). Although the directors of private ECE centres must observe the requirements of the ministry, in reality this is not always the case. This means that directors fulfil their leadership role differently in different contexts, according to abilities, resources, and priorities.

ECE in Palestine is still underdeveloped, and services are not well distributed among its communities. However, there is a considerable and growing interest in early childhood education (ECE) from stakeholders. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education emphasises the importance of ECE in the Palestinian Strategic Sector Plan 2017–2022 (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2017a). The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education has identified strategic goals, targets, challenges, and suggestions that would meet several needs related to improving ECE in Palestine. These needs directly relate to, among other things, promoting accountability, results-based leadership, governance, and management (p. 162). Additionally, an evaluation form developed and used by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education highlights the tasks that ECE directors are expected to perform, which are categorised according to five areas: (a) planning according to scientific principles, (b) supervision

and follow-up of human and non-human resources and other matters, (c) professional development for directors and for educators, (d) improving children's learning, and (e) relationships/communication (Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2018). As the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education continues to improve the work in ECE by regulating ECE policies, there is a need for more knowledge to develop ECE leadership for the sake of the quality of children's learning, development, and well-being.

Internationally, research suggests that administrative leadership and pedagogical leadership are the most commonly identified leadership functions, including ECE directors' responsibility for managing change and quality improvement (Douglass, 2019). A study of ECE leaders in Finland, Japan, and Singapore has found that leaders in these three countries considered pedagogical leadership and human resources management as the two most important tasks (Hujala et al., 2016). Research on ECE leadership from Palestine shows that the challenges are similar to those that ECE directors face in other countries, such as financial challenges. Other challenges are connected to cultural factors specific to the Palestinian context and to social and political factors related to leading ECE in conflict areas (Sayma et al., 2022). From the Middle East, we have found research focusing on ECE leadership. The study of Omar (2017) focuses on defining the roles, responsibilities, and skills required of ECE directors in Egypt. Its findings indicate the importance of ECE directors having the basic information and skills for using modern approaches in their planning and administration. Another finding relates to identifying problems and being involved in resolving them. Finally, the study highlights the use of recent approaches and means to motivate staff and utilise their efforts. The findings of the study by Abdel Rasoul (2012) states that the prerequisites for implementing an administrative strategy to develop the administration of directors in Egypt are qualified ECE centre directors, a supportive organisational climate, sufficient financing, and directors' involvement in decision-making related to the centres. The study also identifies problems facing the development of ECE in Egypt, such as the weak administrative and educational qualifications of ECE directors. The study by Al-Shtiehi (2016) investigated the support available to directors from the perspectives of executive leaders in Egypt, with the results showing that there is a low level of support available to ECE directors.

To conclude, the above studies show that ECE directors internationally are involved in multiple leadership functions. In view of the lack of leadership studies in Palestine in times of change, this highlights the necessity of paying attention to leadership responsibilities in order to respond to contemporary expectations and challenges. Taking this into consideration, the research question guiding this study is as follows: What are Palestinian ECE directors' current perceptions of their leadership responsibilities?

Next, we present the theoretical framework and the method, followed by the results of the study. Further, the results are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework, with conclusions.

## Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is required to investigate leadership responsibilities in ECE. The study argues that the leadership perspective in Adizes (1991) is fruitful for understanding the functions and responsibilities of leadership for directors. According to Adizes (1991), in any organisation there are four leadership functions that are necessary and sufficient to develop the organisation effectively, and it is a leadership responsibility to ensure these functions. The responsibilities relate to the roles of producer, administrator, entrepreneur, and integrator. Scholars have used Adizes' leadership framework and translated Adizes' categories into the leadership responsibilities and functions of directors in ECE (Børhaug & Gotvassli, 2016; Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2016). Adizes (1991) explains leadership functions in the category of **producer** as creating the core results of the organisation. In ECE, this means using pedagogical leadership to lead pedagogical work focusing on children's play, formation, and learning. Leadership functions related to **administrator** embrace planning in detail, coordination, deciding on rules and procedures, and controlling the work in the organisation. In ECE, this means practical administration, finance, documentation, and deciding on the rules and routines for the centre. The functions attached to **entrepreneur** involve creative leadership with a focus on utilising room for manoeuvre so that it is possible for the organisation to meet the demands of the community. In ECE, this means intentional leadership to increase financial resources, market the centre, and make the centre visible in social media. Another important aspect of this category is communication with parents, families, and other

welfare organisations attached to the centre. The last category is **integrator**, which is related to staff leadership and the work of leading staff from thinking and working as individuals to thinking and working as a team. In ECE, this means focusing on professional development, motivating staff in their pedagogical work with children, and resolving staff conflicts. Also, employment and scheduling are important functions within this category. Together, all four functions provide sustainable leadership of the ECE centre. The theoretical framework of leadership functions as producer, administrator, entrepreneur, and integrator will be used here to discuss Palestinian ECE directors' current perceptions of their leadership responsibilities as stated in the data for this study.

## Method

This study used a quantitative descriptive research method. The population studied consisted of all Palestinian directors of ECE centres located in the West Bank (WB) and the Gaza Strip (GS). A purposeful sample was selected of 166 directors of ECE centres to serve the purposes of the study using a Google survey technique. The sample consisted of a total of 166 respondents: 118 (71 per cent) from the WB and 48 (29 per cent) from the GS. Of these, 98 (59 per cent) were working as directors only, while 68 (41 per cent) were working as directors and educators at the same time. Furthermore, 61 per cent had a BA and 23 per cent had a BA with a diploma. Directors with only a high school education and diploma,<sup>1</sup> or who had received only workshop training, accounted for 8 per cent. Directors who had an MA accounted for another 8 per cent.

The quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions after its validity was tested by seven experts (referee validity) and its reliability was tested using Cronbach Alfa (0.94). The questionnaire was developed based on open discussion with Palestinian directors (later not included in the sample), related literature and studies, and the rich experiences of the authors in the field. The questionnaire included an introduction, set out the purpose of the study, gave assurance of anonymity (ethical consideration), described how to answer the items, and provided demographic data about the respondents, followed by closed-ended questions relating to the responsibilities of the directors. The seven areas used in the closed-ended questionnaire were responsibilities related to 1) children, 2) the physical environment of the ECE, 3) daily routine and administrative

organisation, 4) parents and the local community, 5) programmes and activities, 6) educators, and, finally, 7) finance. These seven areas are reflected in the theoretical framework. A five-point Likert scale ranging from very little (one point) to very much (five points) was used for answering the closed-ended questions.

In addition, the questionnaire contained an open-ended question in which the respondents were asked to name three to five of the most important responsibilities of directors. The answers to the open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis. All open-ended answers were read and searched for overlapping themes. Next, they were grouped according to themes of responsibilities (Braun & Clark, 2006). Finally, each category was presented in a table with both how many times the category appears in the material and how often in relation to percentage the category appears.

The questionnaire was administered in July 2020. The identity of the respondents was kept anonymous. The quantitative data collected were analysed using a descriptive statistical analysis in which the qualitative data were summarised, categorised according to themes and the numbers of respondents, and presented according to themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). The results of the study are based on the responses from the sample of directors (166 directors) to the scaled questionnaire (Likert scale of one to five points) and the open-ended question.

All research ethics procedures were followed, including those relating to protecting the identity of the respondents (Žukauskas et al., 2018). The collected data were fully anonymised. The research protocol that explains the nature of the study, the expected role of the respondents, the respondents' rights, and how the questionnaire was documented was discussed in the research team and sent to the potential respondents to look at, enabling them to express their willingness to participate in the study. Those who did not agree did not respond to the questionnaire.

## Results

### *Responsibilities of the Directors in General*

Results related to the directors' responses to the scaled questions reflected in seven areas of directors' responsibility as listed in the closed-ended questionnaire. The responsibilities ranked in order from

high to low are related to children (4.53 – very high) and the environment of the kindergarten (4.47), daily routine/administrative work (4.30), parents and community and programmes and activities (4.18 each), and educators (4.14 – about average). However, finance-related responsibility received the lowest level ranking (3.25) (see [Table 5.1](#)). Tables [5.2](#) to [5.8](#) include details of the responsibilities related to each of the seven areas in the closed-ended questionnaire and [Table 5.9](#) includes the results from the open-ended answers. Finally, [Table 5.10](#) sums up all responsibilities categorised in the four leadership functions of Adizes (1991).

**Table 5.1:** Responsibilities of ECE leaders ranked in order from high to low.

Ranking	Area of responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Responsibilities related to children	166	4.53	0.54	Very much
2.	Responsibilities related to the physical environment of the kindergarten	166	4.47	0.62	Much
3.	Responsibilities related to daily routine and administrative organisation	166	4.30	0.69	Much
4.	Responsibilities related to parents and the local community	166	4.18	0.74	Much
5.	Responsibilities related to programmes and activities	166	4.18	0.77	Much
6.	Responsibilities related to educators	166	4.14	0.81	Much
7.	Responsibilities related to finance	166	3.25	1.28	Average
Overall	-	166	4.15	0.78	Much

### Areas of Leadership Responsibility

There are seven identified areas of responsibility based on the directors' responses to the scaled questions. These are ranked in order from high to low as: children, environment, daily routine work, parents/community, programmes and activities, educators and, finally, finance. Areas of leadership responsibilities are presented in detail in tables 5.2 to 5.8. The findings are discussed in the discussion and conclusion section.

**Table 5.2:** R1 directors' responsibilities related to children ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Observe what the children eat and buy (food and drinks)	166	4.64	0.80	Very much
2.	Resolve children's behaviour problems	166	4.56	0.62	Very much
3.	Follow the children's files, their growth, and development	166	4.49	0.78	Much
4.	Encourage and invite children to enrol in kindergarten	166	4.42	0.99	Much
Overall	-	166	4.53	0.54	Very much

**Table 5.3:** R2 directors' responsibilities related to the kindergarten's physical environment ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Make sure there is a safe environment for the children	166	4.82	0.48	Very much
2.	Ensure the cleanliness of the kindergarten health facilities (bathrooms, rooms, halls, offices ...)	166	4.80	0.63	Very much
3.	Work towards improving the physical environment of the kindergarten	166	4.43	0.97	Much
4.	Strive for a suitable environment for children with disabilities in the kindergarten	166	3.83	1.52	Much
Overall	-	166	4.47	0.62	Much

**Table 5.4:** R3 directors' responsibilities related to daily/routine work of the kindergarten ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Follow up problems that occur in the kindergarten and work at resolving them	166	4.74	0.60	Very much
2.	Follow up the practice/implementation of quality assurance criteria	166	4.56	0.80	Very much
3.	Supervise and monitor the web page of the kindergarten	166	4.51	1.08	Very much
4.	Prepare and organise the daily schedule of the kindergarten	166	4.47	0.87	Much
5.	Supervise the daily administrative issues of the kindergarten	166	4.43	1.07	Much
6.	Organise activities for promoting the kindergarten and its programmes	166	4.34	1.10	Much
7.	Attend and participate in symposiums, conferences, and workshops relating to kindergartens	166	4.16	1.29	Much
8.	Enforce rules and regulations to organise routine work	166	4.11	1.03	Much
9.	Submit reports to those in charge/owners or to outside entities with an interest in children and kindergarten affairs	166	3.33	1.75	Much
Overall	-	166	4.33	0.69	Much

**Table 5.5:** R4 directors' responsibilities related to parents and the local community ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Communicate continuously/regularly with parents and guardians	166	4.56	0.87	Very much
2.	Give feedback to parents about their children's growth and development	166	4.44	0.93	Much
3.	Communicate with formal and non-formal institutes in the local community	166	3.87	1.16	Much
4.	Be knowledgeable about the resources available in the local community and how to benefit from them	166	3.84	1.12	Much
Overall	-	166	4.18	0.74	Much

**Table 5.6:** R5 directors' responsibilities related to programmes and activities ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Supervise the development of activities and programmes in kindergarten	166	4.55	0.77	Very much
2.	Develop and initiate new professional projects	166	3.81	1.16	Much
Overall	-	166	4.18	0.77	Much

**Table 5.7:** R6 directors' responsibilities related to ECE educators ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Distribute assignments and responsibilities among educators	166	4.57	0.87	Very much
2.	Furnish educators with guidance and advice on how to deal with children	166	4.46	0.90	Very much
3.	Encourage educators to undertake professional development and facilitate this	166	4.46	0.91	Very much
4.	Follow up educators' daily administrative work	166	4.42	0.95	Very much
5.	Evaluate educators' work in productive, educational ways	166	4.40	0.97	Very much
6.	Enhance the social relationship between the director and the educators and among the educators themselves	166	4.38	0.95	Very much
7.	Have consideration and respect for educators' psychological and professional situation/conditions	166	4.37	0.88	Very much
8.	Follow up educators' daily education work	166	4.30	0.92	Very much
9.	Share social and personal occasions with educators	166	4.10	1.11	Much
10.	Select educators for employment in the kindergarten	166	3.82	1.65	Much
11.	Give incentives (moral and material) to educators to encourage outstanding work	166	3.62	1.50	Much

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
12.	Take decisions to renew educators' contract and continue their work	166	3.57	1.70	Much
13.	Define and supervise educators' and assistants' responsibilities and roles	166	3.31	1.92	Much
Overall	-	166	4.14	0.81	Much

**Table 5.8:** R7 Directors' responsibilities related to finance ranked from high to low.

Ranking	Responsibility	N	M	SD	Degree
1.	Follow financial issues: buying and expenses	166	4.01	1.62	Much
2.	Seek external financial support for the kindergarten	166	3.01	1.82	Low
3.	Determine the salaries of educators and other staff	166	2.74	2.05	Low
Overall	-	166	3.25	1.28	Low

In responding to the open-ended question, the directors wrote 380 responses related to their responsibilities. These are grouped into 11 areas (Table 5.9). The responses to the open-ended question show 11 areas of responsibility as referred to by the directors themselves. These are, in rank order, related to educators, yearly/monthly and daily schedules, children, ECE facilities, the inside physical environment of the ECE facilities, financial issues, parents, a suitable physical environment, the web page, administration/individuals in charge, and the local community.

Finally, we use Adizes' (1991) leadership framework to categorise the findings regarding the ECE directors' perceptions of their everyday leadership responsibilities and their prioritisation of tasks. In Table 5.10, we have organised the results within the seven domains from the closed-ended questionnaire, with the average score and the open-ended response regarding the most important responsibilities of directors with percentages. All these are categorised within the four leadership functions: producer, administrator, entrepreneur, and integrator.

**Table 5.9:** Frequencies and percentages of the responsibilities of the directors as stated by themselves in response to the open-ended question listed in the questionnaire in rank order from high to low.

Ranking	Types of responsibilities of directors	F	%
1.	Provide technical and educational supervision of educators' work, follow their pro-fessional development, and give them guidance and support	65	17.10
2.	Prepare yearly, monthly, and daily plans and class schedules, and plan for internal and external activities	56	14.70
3.	Observe the children's needs and their health, psychological, and behavioural problems	46	12.10
4.	Oversee the kindergarten facilities: canteens, yards, and classrooms	42	11.10
5.	Organise the physical environment and oversee issues of cleanliness, tidiness, and safety	34	8.95
6.	Oversee administrative and financial matters (prepare reports and organise ex-penditures, fee payments, and daily work)	31	8.20
7.	Follow up with parents: regular direct and electronic communication with parents and engaging them in planning and implementing activities and resolving problems	29	7.60
8.	Secure a suitable environment for children's health and social-psychological situa-tions	28	7.40
9.	Oversee the web page of the kindergarten and promote it using social media	21	5.50
10.	Communicate with those in charge of the kindergarten and submit reports to them	15	3.95
11.	Maintain communication with the local community and obtain financial and social support	13	3.40
Total	-	380	100

**Table 5.10:** All responsibilities with scale ranging and percentages categorised in the four leadership functions of Adizes (1991).

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Likert score (1-5) or percentage</b>
Producer	Responsibilities related to children	4.53
	Responsibilities related to programmes and activities	4.18
	Observe the children's needs and their health, psychological, and behavioural problems	12.10%
	Prepare yearly, monthly, and daily plans and class schedules, and plan for internal and external activities	14.70%
Administrator	Responsibilities related to finance	3.25
	Responsibilities related to daily routine and administrative organisation	4.30
	Responsibilities related to the physical environment of the kindergarten	4.47
	Oversee the kindergarten facilities: canteens, yards, and classrooms	11.10%
	Organise the physical environment and oversee issues of cleanliness, tidiness, and safety	8.95%
	Oversee administrative and financial matters (prepare reports and organise expenditures, fee payments, and daily work)	8.20%
	Communicate with those in charge of the kindergarten and submit reports to them	3.95%
Entrepreneur	Responsibilities related to parents and the local community	4.18
	Follow up with parents: regular direct and electronic communication with parents and engaging them in planning and implementing activities and resolving problems	7.60%
	Secure a suitable environment for children's health and social-psychological situations	7.40%
	Oversee the web page of the kindergarten and promote it using social media	5.50%
	Maintain communication with the local community and obtain financial and social support	3.40%
Integrator	Responsibilities related to educators	4.14
	Provide technical and educational supervision of educators' work, follow their professional development, and give them guidance and support	17.10%

In the following section, we discuss the findings in each category in relation to producer, administrator, entrepreneur, and integrator. Further, in these different functions, the findings are discussed in relation to literature and research.

## Discussion

### *Producer*

The directors' most important responsibilities from their point of view relate to the children. Responsibilities for children are scored as high as a 4.53 average score. These include responsibility for the children's growth and development, for resolving children's behaviour problems, and also for what the children eat and drink during the day. Further, yearly, monthly, and daily planning and planning on internal and external activities and class schedules are responsibilities that 14.7 per cent of the directors prioritise in the open-ended answers, which emphasises their responsibilities for teaching and learning. In addition to observing the children's needs and their health, directors emphasise psychological and behavioural problems. These findings demonstrate the directors' awareness of their role as pedagogical leaders who—by their actions, speech, or otherwise—promote pedagogical activity (Lahtinen, 2017) and provide a high-quality programme for the children's learning, all-round development, and well-being. Pedagogical leadership in respect of teaching and learning, curriculum, and pedagogy are currently high on the political agenda globally (OECD, 2019). Supporting all children so that they can learn and develop to their full potential is a core leadership responsibility. According to Modise (2019), the most important task a director can perform is the advancement and improvement of the learning context so that it is of a high quality. Several studies state that leadership is a key factor in influencing the quality of ECE and describe how leadership affects the pedagogical functioning of multi-professional staff as well as professional development (Waniganayake et al., 2015). Modise (2019) argues that for current leadership to be evident in ECE, pedagogical leadership must be more precise in its approach. Findings indicate that pedagogical leadership, given its concern with context, children, parents, and pedagogical development, requires a shared understanding of ECE practices in order to be able to enact pedagogical leadership (Heikka, 2014).

### *Administrator*

When we categorised the responsibilities according to the four leadership functions, most of the responsibilities belonged to the administrator category even if they did not get the highest score or percentage. However, several tasks stand out. Overseeing ECE facilities, such as the canteens, yards, and classrooms, and issues relating to cleanliness, tidiness, and safety, as well as organising the physical environment, seeing to administrative and financial matters, coordinating the daily work, and ensuring a suitable environment for the children's health and social-psychological situations, are all perceived as everyday administrative leadership responsibilities. While pedagogical leadership requires a shift from focusing solely on administrative leadership (Modise, 2019), the findings show that there are not always sharp distinctions between these tasks, as administrative leadership refers to leadership operations that facilitate and safeguard appropriate conditions for children's learning, development, and well-being. Also, Douglass (2019) points out that administrative leadership and pedagogical leadership are the most commonly identified leadership functions.

Nonetheless, research has highlighted a concern about the administrative workload (Bøe et al., 2020; Douglass, 2019; Elomaa et al., 2020; OECD, 2019; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018). Specifically, these concerns relate to administrative tasks preventing directors from assuming pedagogical leadership. The Palestinian directors' perception of their responsibilities indicates that, in practice, they are highly engaged in administrative functions that require a balancing of competing tasks. Findings from a study of ECE directors in Finland, Japan, and Singapore show that it was difficult to find the time to adequately engage in both administrative and pedagogical leadership tasks because of the multiple demands directors face in their daily work (Hujala et al., 2016). Similarly, Al-Ahmari's (2017) study indicates that directors do their work according to the reality of the centres, the available resources, and the rules and regulations imposed by higher administration. The wide range of areas of responsibility identified in the current study indicates that directors must deal with multiple competing tasks. According to Tengblad (2012, p. 348), everyday leadership is characterised by work pressures and a hectic work pace, uncertainty, ambiguity, and interruptions, where leaders must respond to immediate problems and adapt to the situation. The

findings in this study draw attention to the significance of the reality of leadership and thus suggest a need for further exploration of leadership as social practice.

### *Entrepreneur*

In this category, responsibilities relate to regular contact with parents and the local community. This includes giving feedback to parents about their children's growth and development. As part of the total amount of the workload, the frequency of following up with parents has an average score. This relates to maintaining regular direct and electronic communication with the parents and engaging them in planning, implementing activities, and resolving problems. This category also includes the directors' communication with formal and non-formal institutes locally. According to the directors, their emphasis is on knowledge of the local resources available and how to benefit from them.

An important task in the entrepreneur category is profiling and marketing. Maintaining the centre's web page and using social media to promote it are part of the directors' responsibilities, as is communicating with those who are in charge of the centre and submitting reports to them. These findings coincide with two of the strategies that Børhaug and Lotsberg (2010) found in their study on how Norwegian directors are involved in external leadership: profiling and visualisation of the centre and measures to link parents more closely to the centre. Similarly, a national Norwegian review concluded that there is much to suggest that ECE directors are assuming complex and growing leadership responsibilities and extended these leadership responsibilities to leading relationships with the environment (the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018) (see also OECD, 2019).

With the acknowledgment (Janta et al., 2016; Melhuish et al., 2015) of the importance of ECE as something beneficial for all children's successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and, later, employability, collaboration with different stakeholders is important to provide resources and structures for pedagogical leadership and development. In this case, Heikka (2014) argues that leadership responsibility should be distributed between different stakeholders at the macro and centre levels as a prerequisite to improvement and the development of efficient pedagogical leadership.

### *Integrator*

It is evident that ECE directors have many responsibilities related to educators, although staff leadership tasks are ranked second lowest. This can be seen in the responsibility for defining and supervising educators' and assistants' responsibilities and roles, as it is scored at just 3.31 (see Table 5.7), which is the lowest except for scores connected to responsibilities for finance. Leadership responsibility in this category varies between defining staff job responsibilities and following up on staff and their professional development. The highest scores are for responsibility for distributing assignments and responsibilities among educators, and for furnishing educators with guidance and advice on how to deal with children. The third highest scored responsibility is to encourage educators to undertake professional development and to facilitate this. Nevertheless, the most frequent responsibility in the open-ended answers refers to the directors as the technical and educational supervisors of educators' work, following up on their professional development and providing guidance and support (17.10 per cent). One way that leadership might improve pedagogical work is through its influence on and support for professional development. Studies suggest that directors' leadership influences a set of practices that may have a positive impact on children's learning, development, and well-being. These practices include supporting staff professional development and learning, engaging staff in decision-making and leading change, and creating structures to enable teachers to collaborate and plan for improvement (Douglass, 2019, p. 23).

Studies from Palestine indicate challenges in the ECE sector in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as ECE teachers are not all specialists and have a low awareness of effective ECE teaching and learning practices (Khales, 2015; Sayma et al., 2022). Many teachers end up in the education sector because they do not believe there are alternative job opportunities. Low salaries and low status mean that teaching is not an attractive profession, leading to a high rate of teacher turnover. Few professional development opportunities exist for individuals who want to become specialised in preschool education and in-service training, which means that most teachers continue to use poor pedagogical methods (Khales, 2015; Sayma et al., 2022). These findings suggest that the leadership of ECE directors plays a central role in developing staff,

building a culture of collaboration and reflection, and improving the quality of teaching by strengthening the existing workforce.

## Conclusion

ECE directors in Palestine take on leadership responsibilities for a wide range of areas and functions that are necessary for the effective development of the organisation. The responsibilities reported in this study reinforce existing findings about the importance of leadership to ECE centres and thus fully recognise the director's role in securing and safeguarding the organisation's goals and core responsibilities. Moreover, the study has provided valuable information about how directors perceive their everyday leadership responsibilities, which is of great value in further developing the quality of ECE to support children's learning, all-round development, and well-being. Additionally, to improve quality it is essential to recruit directors and keep them in their job, as well as to evaluate their leadership. According to the evaluation form of ECE directors' leadership responsibilities reported by the Palestine Ministry of Education, key responsibilities are planning, supervision, following up on professional growth, children's education, relationships, and communication (Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2018). Our findings add to this evaluation by suggesting that administrative leadership tasks and following up on staff are everyday leadership responsibilities that form a large part of directors' work. As this is the first comprehensive study on the responsibilities of Palestinian ECE directors, we believe that its results are a useful contribution that will assist other researchers in the conduct of further studies, particularly when stakeholders continue to improve the work in ECE by regulating ECE policies. As this study took place at a time of rapid development in Palestinian education in general and in ECE education specifically, the results of the study will help the ministry in developing the responsibilities of ECE directors based on certain theoretical frameworks that suit the Palestinian context, support ECE supervisors to look at the functions of the directors, support and guide ECE centres directors, and evaluate their functions. It will also be an available reference to students majoring in ECE, to ECE directors, and to educators.

There are no studies without limitations, and this applies to this one too. Our study is limited to descriptive research that depends on

questionnaires, with no face-to-face interviews, either individually or in groups of directors, which could enrich and deepen the results of the study. No observations were conducted as part of the study methodology. Further, the study focused solely on the perspective of the ECE directors on their responsibilities and excluded consideration of how ECE educators, supervisors, parents, and officials perceive their responsibilities. We encourage other researchers to follow up this study both in Palestine and around the world, seeking a deeper understanding of the leadership of ECE directors to acquire greater insights by way of exploring leadership responsibilities using other perspectives and in-depth qualitative methods.

## Notes

- 1 A two-year programme offered after candidates completed high school with grades too low to enable them to enrol in a bachelor's degree programme or where they did not want to study for four years.

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