

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

UNDERSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP IN THE
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICAN REGION: ESSENTIAL
EXPERIENCES, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE NEEDED TO
FULFILL THIS ROLE

By
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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of Education
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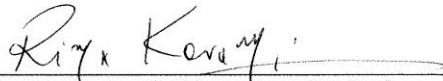
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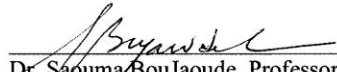
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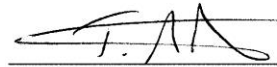
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This thesis marks the end of an extremely long journey to obtain my Master's degree. It started in 1997 and ended in 2017. I completed a diploma in leadership and finished my graduate courses in 2003 but before I started with my thesis I suffered a life changing family crisis that put all my dreams to obtain an MA on hold for more than 10 years. One day, due to pure luck or my mom's prayers, I met my advisor and mentor who said to me: "I will not leave you until you get it." True to her words, she did not leave me. She kept following up with me with her encouraging words, guidance and full support and now here I am. There are not enough words of thanks to the exceptional teacher, advisor, and source of inspiration Dr. Rima Karami.

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Hounaida Adnan Saadeh

for

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Title: Understanding Early Childhood Leadership in the Middle East and North African Region: Essential Experiences, Skills and Knowledge Needed to Fulfill This Role

Given the lack of articulated leadership competencies and pathways to lead early childhood education, this study examined the ways in which early childhood leaders- directors, principals and administrators- have prepared themselves for this leadership role. A study by Khattab (1996) on the academic profiles of early childhood educators showed that they were poorly qualified to say the least. Other research has shown that there is a high correlation between a quality early years setting and good leadership (Muijis et al., 2004; Pugh, 2001; Rodd, 2006; Robins and Callan, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2008). According to McCall (2004) leadership skills are mostly acquired through experience, yet experience alone does not guarantee that leaders have the knowledge and skills to be effective leaders. Furthermore, especially in the Arab region, little is known about those leaders who fulfill this leadership role and scant attention has been paid to the educational and professional development needs of these leaders. This study applied a grounded theory methodological approach to learn about the lived experiences of ten early childhood leaders from various Arab countries; and from this premise derive a contribution to a theoretical understanding of essential skills, knowledge, and experiences needed to fulfill this role. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of the grounded theory.

Regardless of whether early childhood leaders had specific prior experience in their field, findings indicate that participants in this study, identified a need for leadership development focused on relational, pedagogical and managerial dimensions. Findings also revealed that consideration should be given to increasing accountability in the delivery of early childhood education as well as increasing support given to early childhood leaders in their role as advocates for young children. Findings further imply that participation of early childhood leaders in in-depth early childhood education based leadership programs and relationships with mentors will bridge some gaps in knowledge with regards to facilitating overcoming some of the challenges they experience fulfilling this leadership role.

The results suggest that there is a lack of attention paid to the development of early childhood leaders, which revealed a growing gap in the development of leadership competencies, and hence there is a need for further research to inform policies, programs and practices to support the development of well-prepared leaders.

A recommendation for the policymakers is to mandate that early childhood leaders pursue postgraduate degrees in early childhood leadership that include relational, pedagogical and managerial competencies. Moreover, preparation programs should build early childhood leaders' leadership capacity and prepare them to be pro-active and skillful leaders ready to be 'change agents' who can affect policy making. Another recommendation for policymakers is to create a predetermined career path for early childhood leadership that includes a formal induction program based on mentoring for aspiring early childhood leaders.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact among researchers that the first five years of the child's life are crucial ones and the quality of early experiences will significantly impact later success (Debord, 1991; Vandell 2004; Vandell & Wolfe, 2003). Brain development research also shows that the early years have a great impact on children's future academic achievement (Fleer, 2002; Thompson, 1998). Research shows a significant relationship between a quality preschool program and improved academic and social outcomes for children, especially where the manager is highly qualified (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Smees & Sadler, 2004).

A study by Bella and Bloom (2003) *Zoom: The Impact of Early Childhood Leadership Training on Role Perceptions, Job Performance, and Career Decisions* was conducted with a sample of 182 participants who took part in two different models of leadership training. It was found that the perception of competence is strongly linked to the level of education and less to the years of experience. These findings correlate with the finding from Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Smees,... and Sadler (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)* study that found that the higher the qualifications of the manager, the better the quality of the curriculum and the relationship with and between staff and parents.

Most of the research supports the fact that the higher the quality of early childhood leadership the better the learning outcomes for children (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

Since the dawn of the 21st century, the field of education is making a paradigm shift from a K-12 to P-12 due to the recognition of the importance of early childhood education,

hence the need for effective leadership in this field (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning [McREL], 2013). However, research on the field of early childhood leadership is almost non-existent (Dockett & Sumison, 2004; Geoghegan, Petriwskyj, Bower, & Geoghegan, 2003; Mujs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004) and most of the leadership research is on K-12 (Spillane, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1989; Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Early childhood directors are considered “the gatekeepers of quality” as their responsibility is to create an enriching environment that helps the children grow socially and intellectually and ensure that quality is maintained (Bloom, 1992; Rood 1994; Kagan & Bowman 1997; Culkin 2000). However, the professional training for early years’ administrators is often than not inadequate. Their training is more on child development, assessment, classroom management or curriculum design, but not on the leadership and management of the program (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004).

Purpose and Statement of the Problem

My educational background and work experience triggered my interest. I have worked as an early childhood administrator in national as well as international schools in Lebanon, and Egypt. I also worked as an early childhood trainer in UAE, Egypt, Lebanon, and Pakistan. When talking with the administrators of the early childhood programs in these various countries, I found that their major concern was the lack of understanding of the complexity of the early childhood leader’s role and the skills required to prepare for this role. This is in line with what the literature reports on the experience of early childhood leaders worldwide (Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2011).

Throughout the years I have witnessed that early childhood leadership roles are not necessarily filled by those who acquired degrees in early childhood but rather because of demonstration of good teaching skills or longevity in their position.

Moreover, those who hold degrees in early childhood education as teachers might be lacking the basic knowledge and understanding of organizational leadership. According to McCall (2004) leadership skills are mostly acquired through experience but experience alone doesn't guarantee that leaders have the knowledge to be effective leaders.

Professional positions, other than early childhood usually have a career path. For example, an elementary or high school principal hold the position of an assistant principal for a few years before assuming the principal position. However, this is not the case in an early childhood setting as they are usually promoted directly from within the teaching staff (Bredenkamp, 1995; Culkin, 2000; Larkin, 1999).

Most of the research on early childhood in the MENA region is done by the UNESCO (Khatab, 1995; Faour & Al Suwaigh, 2010) or the World Bank (El-Kogali & Krafft, 2015) and they tackle the status of Early Childhood (EC) education in general with emphasis on curriculum, programs, child care as in health and nutrition and teachers. There is little or no reference to EC leadership and its role in these studies.

This study explores early childhood leadership in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region from the perspective of ten early childhood administrators from various Arab countries. It examines the pathways and experiences that led to their leadership role and how they managed their departments or centers despite the lack of early childhood leadership based preparation program in the region. This study examines the expectations and demands of the early childhood leaders' role and the experiences that contribute to their leadership growth as well as the challenges that hinder it. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the educational as well as experiential requirements that these early childhood leaders need to be able to fulfill

their role, making a first installment of culturally grounded understanding of this leadership role.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What formal and informal professional experiences have early childhood leaders had that have contributed to:
 - a. Gaining access to the position?
 - b. Enhancing their professional learning and preparing them to perform their role?
2. What do early childhood leaders perceive as necessary skills and knowledge that leaders need to acquire to fulfill this role?
3. What is the nature of the role of the early childhood leaders in the MENA region from the perspective of the role occupants?
4. What are the challenges that the early childhood leaders in the MENA region faced?

Rationale of the Problem

There is a paucity of research on early childhood leadership and little or no attention is paid to the roles that early childhood leaders play as well as the best practices for training and preparing them as leaders. There is also lack of understanding of who are the early childhood leaders and how do they make meaning of their role as leaders (Wise & Wright, 2012). Austin and Morrow (1986) believe that early childhood administrators have the same responsibilities and demands as a school principal, however, there isn't enough research in the field to identify how early childhood administrators respond to these demands.

Many studies on educational leadership have been conducted especially on high school, middle school and elementary schools (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). However, not much has been done at the early childhood level (Mujis et al., 2004; Rodd, 1998). The dominant perception is that leadership is not a major concern at the preschool level (Bricker, 2000). Rodd (1998) believes that this has resulted in the fact that there is no clear definition for the term leadership in early childhood.

Research in the field of early childhood is dominated by a few researchers and is limited in scope (Muijs et al., 2004). Early childhood educators lack the knowledge base that they consult to guide their practice. Mujis et al. (2004) found that most of the research is mostly anecdotal and could barely reach the level of tips for the teachers. Jorde-Bloom (2003), was among the early researchers to conduct a study on early childhood leadership and her findings state that early childhood leaders have a very limited view of their role as managers as they view themselves as educators rather than managers. Moreover, early childhood leaders are found to be recipients of change from other educational levels rather than initiators (Stonehouse, 1994). According to Fleer (1995), the field needs its own leaders instead of taking its direction and leadership influence from others. Recent calls have been made for the early childhood leaders to voice their needs and perception as leaders (Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon 2000; Waniganayaki, Morda & Kapsalakis, 2000).

Based on the above, there is a need for data that can help us understand the current status of early childhood leaders in the Middle East and the experiences that have informed, shaped and enhanced their leadership. Furthermore, it is important to understand how these leaders managed to lead with the lack of an articulated pathway

and a unified set of competencies. It is critical to expand the theories of leadership to include leadership in the early childhood settings (Wise & Wright, 2012).

Merriam (1998) believes that individuals construct reality as they interact with their social worlds. Hence, to understand reality one needs to see it from the perspective of the people experiencing it (Merriam, 1998). This qualitative research will try to understand how early childhood leaders construct reality through their own experiences. It is important to understand leadership and management issues facing the directors playing this role.

Significance of the Study

This research hopes to contribute to the development of a theory of leadership that includes the necessary experiences, training and professional development programs that could help prepare skilled early childhood leaders. It uses the grounded theory methodology to ensure that the theoretical understanding that will emerge will be both rooted in the practitioners' perspectives as well as the unique sociocultural conditions of the Arab region. It also addresses practitioners who understand the significance of the early years and considers that the conditions for children and the workforce that contribute to their education and wellbeing should be improved. It is also addressed to the policymakers who can affect the quality of early childhood preparation programs by forming an articulated pathway to professional early childhood leadership. A culturally grounded understanding of early childhood leadership that can assist policymakers in developing national standards that might become the foundation for instituting leadership training programs, as well as the basis for establishing a systemic formative and summative evaluation process for early childhood leaders.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature is divided into eleven sections all pertaining to: early childhood education, leadership in education, and professional development. The literature review begins with an overview of early childhood education- its definition, significance, and its development in the Arab world. Next, the literature review explores leadership in education, in particular: leadership models; contemporary leadership approaches; leadership models and early childhood education; effective educational leadership; roles of leaders in the organizational context; roles of the K-12 principal; and the role of the early childhood leader. Finally, the review of literature examines professional development in relation to: principal preparation; and professional development and preparation of early childhood leaders.

Early Childhood Education an Overview

Early childhood education (ECE) is the formal care and education that is offered to young children in a setup different from home. The largest professional organization representing early childhood, the National Association for the Education of Young Children- known as NAEYC- defined early childhood as the period ranging from birth to eight years of age. Some early childhood practitioners' work in center-based care for children as young as from six weeks to five years of age, while others work as preschool, kindergarten, and primary teachers in schools with children three years up to eight years of age (Rodd, 2012).

The importance of early years has been addressed since the time before Christ [B.C.]. Plato believed that children learn through play rather than recitation. He believed that early childhood was important enough to receive public policy and support (Plato, 380 B.C.E). Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi believed that teaching children is a means for improving society;

and Jean Jacques Rousseau stated that teachers should observe children and determine their readiness for learning before exposing them to books. He also believed that schools should be child-centred (Roopanrine, 2005). Froebel agreed that teachers need to foster the children's creativity and curiosity rather than just impart knowledge (Fullan, 2007). Though these views about early childhood were presented by philosophers centuries ago, their ideologies are still evident in today's practices.

Early childhood started in the Arab world in the form of Koranic schools- where verses of the holy book were taught to Muslim children. Most of these schools operated inside the mosques and were the only teaching sector that provided an education for preschoolers. The language of instruction was taught in Arabic and children were taught arithmetic, Arabic language, and Koran. These schools played a major role in the upbringing of a Muslim child. When Arab countries fell under colonial rule, Western Education was introduced at the hands of Western missionaries. This type of education, however, was only offered to elite groups and the traditional Koranic schools remained the most common type of Early Childhood education offered. These traditional schools still continue to be found mostly in rural areas today; however, some have evolved by introducing art and music programs and there is a major improvement in the structure of the facilities and amenities so that the school is deemed more child-friendly (UNESCO, 1993).

When Arab countries gained their independence, each country began developing its own national system of education. The governments began controlling and formalizing education through their ministries of Education and Islamic affairs. Free education was promoted by many leaders as a critical aspect of nation-building. Today all preschools, private or public, are regulated by the Ministry of Education (UNESCO,

1993). A recent study by UNESCO (2010) on the State of Early Childhood in the Arab World found that finding qualified teachers was difficult mainly due to low pay and the way they are viewed by society as “child minders” rather than “educators”. The study also showed that the qualifications of an early childhood teacher, or administrator, vary within different Arab countries. The general requirement of an early childhood teacher and/or administrator is a bachelor degree or higher, however, the reality is different. Some countries, such Iraq, Yemen, and Mauritania accept a secondary degree as sufficient qualification for teachers working in a nursery school. In Syria, only 14% are qualified with a specific degree while in Bahrain it is 12%. (Faour & Al Suwaigh, 2010). However, for teachers working in a formal school setting, they need to have a four-year college degree (UNESCO, 2010). According to Khattab (1995), “The existing regional literature on early childhood is scarce and no current information or assessment is available on studies and reports related to preschool education in the MENA region” (p. 17). A recent study by El-Kogali and Krafft (2015) on early childhood development and education in the MENA region shows that investment in the early childhood development in this region is among the lowest in the world.

Definitions of Leadership

A plethora of leadership definitions has been offered in the recent past years. Katz and Kahn (1966) explained it as “any act of influence on a matter of organizational relevance” (p334), whereas Northouse (2007) defined it as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Burns (1978) defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations- the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations- of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). Posner (2007) describe leaders as role models who inspire a shared vision,

enable others to act by engaging the heart. All these definitions portray leadership as an influence where one person or a group of people influence others and structure their activities and relationship in an organization (Yukl, 2002).

Bolman and Deal (2003) defined the practice of leadership and divided it into four frames: (a) the structural frame, (b) the human resource frame, (c) the political frame, and (d) the symbolic frames. Leaders need to have the capacity to use any of the four frames as the situation arises to be able to lead effectively. The structural frame works best when there is a need for defining goals and roles, clarity and structure. This frame functions on the premise of restructuring organizations, creating policies, procedures, and hierarchies. The human resource frame focuses on the people by building a positive environment, motivating people and utilizing their ideas and skills through participative management and organizational democracy. Operating from the political frame, such leaders see the organization as a political arena where there is constant competition for power and scarce resources. Managers using the political frame should possess skills in setting agendas, networking and forming coalitions, bargaining and negotiating as well as dealing with internal and external politics. The fourth frame is the symbolic frame, which harnesses the tribal nature of organizations in terms of cultivating a culture through symbolism to create meaning. This frame is about seeing possibilities, creating a common vision and leading by example (Bolman & Deal, 2007). While Bolman and Deal (2007) presented leadership in terms of four frames, Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) have defined school leadership as “the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (p. 11).

In the field of early childhood education, the term leadership remains vague and incomplete (Rodd, 1998). Kagan and Bowman (1997) pointed that despite the attention given to the leadership field, there is a notable absence of early childhood in the discussions. Mujis et al. (2004) highlighted two reasons for this absence. First, early childhood leaders- principals, directors, and administrators- see themselves as educators rather than managers. Second, these leaders usually focus on interacting with children rather than accomplishing managerial tasks.

Rodd (1998) sees leadership in early childhood as being:

About the experiences and environment provided for children, the relationships between adults and adults and children, meeting and protecting the rights of adults and children and working collaboratively, crossing existing artificial boundaries to meet the concerns of all concerned with the care and education of young children (p. xv).

Leadership Models

Effective leadership is a widely researched topic as it is correlated with school development (Blase & Blase 1998; Earley & Weindling 2005; Sanders 2006). Guskey and Huberman (1995) explained, “Different models of leadership have their own theoretical assumptions and are informed by different bodies of research” (p. 2). They also added that these models are grounded in different perspectives, therefore leading to different views on how to induce improvement. The following section is a discussion of the classical as well as contemporary leadership models.

The twentieth century witnessed an increased interest in leadership whereby, the focus was on the leaders’ qualities which distinguished them from their followers as the Trait theory by Stogdill (1948) suggested. Later, followed by the behaviourists claimed that behaviour affects leadership. Then the focus shifted to include other variables such as situational factors and skill levels such as the Contingency leadership model and the Transactional and Transformational models.

Trait Theory

Researchers and theorists spent decades analysing the required leadership skills and attributes. Early research focused on the traits of an individual in order to determine their suitability for leadership. Trait theory by Stogdill (1948), assumes that people are born with inherent characteristics that allow them to be good leaders (Northouse, 2004). Stogdill revised 124 studies of leadership and found only 3 attributes for most leaders: height, intelligence, and initiative. Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified ten characteristics needed in a leader which include being broad-minded, competent, dependable, fair-minded, forward-looking, honest, inspiring, intelligent, supportive and straightforward.

However, criticism of the leader trait paradigm led to further research on how behaviour could predict leadership effectiveness (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011), which led to the behaviour theories such as Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid, Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory and the work on transformational and transactional leadership. Unlike the trait theories, behaviour theories posit that leadership skills can be acquired through learning and experience and not inherent characteristics.

The Managerial Grid Model by Robert R. Blake and Jane Mouton (1964)

This model originally identified five different leadership styles: impoverished, country club, produce or perish, middle-of-the-road and team leader. These styles are based on the concern for people and the concern for production. They include the following categories: (1) Impoverished management – Low results/Low people manifested when the Leader has the least concern for production and the least concern for people; (2) Country club management – High people/Low results reflected when the manager has high concerns for his team but little concern for production; (3) Authority-compliance management- High results/Low people found when the leader has no

regards for his employees' satisfaction and needs as they are just means to an end.

Production and efficiency is the only priority; (4) Middle of the road management- Medium results/Medium people, where balance between the two which requires a lot of compromises. It could lead to dissatisfaction on both sides as neither needs were met; (5) Team leadership- High production/High people, considered by the Blake Mouton model, as the best managerial style as both production and people needs are met.

Leaders with this style involve the employees with production decision and create a team environment. The employees in this model are highly motivated as the success of the organization is considered a success for them.

Situational Leadership

Situational theorists proposed that situation and trait are two major factors that play a role in the emergence of a leader. Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory investigated leader effectiveness by measuring the leader's attitudes using the "least preferred coworker (LPC)" score. Rice (1978) concluded that leaders with Low LPC are task-oriented, whereas high LPC leaders are people oriented. High and low LPC leaders act differently and their behavior depends primarily on how favorable the situation is for the leader. Favorability is measured in terms of three situational variables: (1) Leader-member relation indicates when the leader has a trusting and cooperative relationship with his subordinates; (2) Position power indicates when the leader has authority to evaluate subordinate performance and administer rewards and punishments; (3) task structure pointing at the organization has clear structure with clear goals, objectives and expectations. According to Fiedler's theory, the most favorable situation is when the three variables are available. It also postulates that leaders with low LPC scores are more likely to be effective when the situation is favorable or unfavorable and the leaders

with High LPC scores are more effective when the situation is unfavorable. However, Fiedler's (1967) theory was criticized for lack of evidence supporting a correlation between LPC scores and leader effectiveness. (Ashour, 1973; Green, Alvares, Orris, & Martella, 1970; Korman, 1973; McMahon, 1972; Schriesheim & Kerr, 1976; Shiflett, 1973).

Leadership studies over the past twenty years have been dominated by the paradigm of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership involves a relationship between a leader and followers that moves beyond an exchange of services or rewards (i.e. transactional leadership). Such a relationship is one in which the leaders exercise behaviors that raise the values and ethical standards of followers to new levels (Burns, 1978, 2003).

Contemporary Leadership Approaches

The classical models of leadership are the foundation for today's contemporary models. Many models emerged; these include transformational, transactional, participative, distributive and instructional leadership to name a few. Below is a summary of these contemporary leadership models.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was first developed by Burns (1978) and later different researchers such as Bass (1985); Kouzes and Posner (2002); and Rost (1991) elaborated on it. It is defined as the ability to influence people by appealing to their higher needs. Transformational leaders are seen as inspirational leaders who have the ability to motivate followers without exchanging rewards but rather by providing a higher purpose for their work (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Rost, 1991). The leader is regarded as a guide to followers in terms of organizational processes rather

than the distributor of rewards and punishment. In order to achieve that, the leader should be passionate and committed with the ability to show genuine care for his/her followers by addressing their individual needs. In addition, according to Burns (1978) transformational leadership appeals to the ethical and moral side of the leader and his followers.

In their study on transformational leadership, Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2003) identified five fundamental practices that are essential in leading a successful organization: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Northouse, 2008). In the first one, leaders need to reflect on their own philosophies, be clear of their values, and find their own voice before they can express it to others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). In the second practice, leaders need to be passionate about their vision of the future to transform it to their staff. In the third practice, leaders need to be risk takers by challenging the status quo and embracing change (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The fourth practice is about enabling others which means fostering collaboration, building trust, encouraging teamwork and be open to the ideas of others even if it is diverse from their own. (Northouse, 2010). The fifth practice, encourage the heart, is about appreciating the staff and recognizing their efforts.

Leithwood (1994) conceptualizes transformational leadership along eight dimensions which include: building the vision of the school; establishing its goals; intellectually stimulating students; offering individualized instruction; practicing and modeling the organizational values; demonstrating high expectations from students and teachers; creating a productive school culture; and developing structure to foster participation in school decisions. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) reviewed thirty-two

studies on the effect of transformational leadership in a school setting and found that it has a positive effect on classroom practice, organizational efficiency and instructional quality in a positive manner.

Transactional Leadership

While transformational leadership addresses higher needs, transactional leadership is based on materialistic needs in the form of rewards and punishments. Miller and Miller's (2001) define transactional leadership as an exchange process where heads of departments and principals possess the authority and have the power to give rewards, references and promotions. They see it as a process of exchanging items between leader and follower. Sergiovanni (1992) used the word bartering as it involves give and take between leader and follower similar to that between "buyer" and "seller." Transactional leadership is more commonly used than transformational as it is less complicated (Burns, 1978). A study conducted by Shumate (2011) found a positive correlation between transactional leadership practices and good classroom management.

However, the limitation of transactional leadership is its short-lived commitment to the school's values and mission. According to Avolio and Bass (2004), transactional principals need to have personal characteristics that allow them to have a good rapport with their staff to be able to serve the organization as well as satisfy the teachers' needs.

Participative Leadership

Participative leadership focuses on group leadership and shared decisions and is correlated with organizational effectiveness. The assumptions of participative leadership are, when teachers are involved in the decision making they are more inclined to follow through with it, people are less competitive and more collaborative when they are working together to reach a decision and when more than one person is making the

decision the outcome would be better (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).

Sergiovanni (1984) points that the importance of a participative approach is derived from the fact that it will create a stronger bond amongst staff member and ease the pressure on school principals.

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership is another form of participative leadership; however, the emphasis is on professional development through shared ideas and collaborative effort (Nupponen, 2005). As described by Harris (2004), “distributed leadership is characterized as a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop skills and expertise through working collaboratively” (p. 3). This ideology shifts the work from one to many where the division of labor will be equally distributed among laborers which creates an atmosphere of collaborative teamwork and cooperation on the job (Gronn, 2003).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership emerged in the 1980’s with several conceptualizations. Hallinger’s (2000) conceptualization was the most popular. According to Hallinger (2000), the instructional leadership functions have three dimensions. The first dimension concerns the principal’s role to ensure that the school has clear goals that are known to the staff and these goals mainly focus on students’ academic progress. The second dimension is about supervision of instruction, curriculum coordination, and students’ academic achievement. The third dimension is about school climate, where the principal provides professional development, motivates the staff and protects the instructional time for students.

Instructional leaders should possess professional knowledge and a charismatic personality, as they are ‘hands-on principals’ so to speak whom work along-side the teachers in curriculum and instruction to ensure best practices. Furthermore, they are goal oriented with a narrow mission which is to help students reach certain academic outcomes (Mortimore, 1993; Purkey & Smith, 1984).

In summary, different leadership models present different approaches to management and leadership in education to improve practice. This diversity indicates the possibility of adopting more than one leadership model approach when making a decision, as ‘one size’ does not fit all. As Bolman and Deal (1984) stated “Managers in all organizations can increase their effectiveness and their freedom through the use of multiple vantage points. To be locked into a single path is likely to produce error and self-imprisonment” (p. 4).

Bennis (1993) reflected on leadership saying: “of all the hazy and confounding ideas in social psychology, leadership theory undoubtedly contends for the top nomination. Probably more has been written and less known about leadership than any other topic in behavioural science” (p 259).

Leadership Models and Early Childhood Education

When reviewing the leadership models, it was evident that the themes and ideas were not applicable to early childhood education. Kagan (1994) explains that these leadership models and approaches ignore an important factor in early childhood leadership, which is the fact that it is a female dominant field; thus, early childhood directors are almost always women. Ebbek and Waniganayaki (2003) called it the ‘pink ghetto’ due to the high numbers of females in the field. It is recognized that the way women connect with families and address the children’s need is important in early care services (Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000). Lunn and Bishop (2002) found that the

feminine leadership style empowers rather than dominate; the female leader facilitates but does not dictate. They also possess strong interpersonal skills that facilitate cooperation among their staff. Research affirms that women in leadership develop a democratic community where they empower their staff and engage them in the decision-making process (Applebaum, Hébert, & Leroux, 1999; Manning & Robertson, 2002). Women tend to view leadership as a web of relationships with others where they listen and talk openly about feelings (Rogers, 1988). Moreover, women tend to be more democratic, they teach and learn from others and are supportive and less hierarchical (Hard, 2001; Ozga & Walker, 1995). In conclusion, women in leadership are more open, respectful, and committed to change and continuous development. They believe in sharing goals and setting standards for the staff in regard to values and ethics (Grey, 1999). It is worth mentioning that research on feminine leadership stereotyping by Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that in a female dominated work environment the female leaders tend to act in a more masculine fashion than their male colleagues. Coser (1989), on the other hand, believes that there is no reason to make such an assumption because men and women tend to have a regular set of experiences due to their biological inclinations.

The next part explores the many roles played by the educational leaders in K-12 schools as well as in an early childhood setting.

Effective Educational Leadership

Educational leadership has recently attracted the interest of researchers as studies have shown that influential school principals are key factors to school effectiveness (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). Studies by Leithwood et al. (2004) found that effective leadership has a significant impact on schools and it is second to teaching in its

importance. The principals who create a positive climate and interaction with their teachers and staff could positively influence student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). To Leithwood and Riehl (2003) “Scratch the surface of an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal; peep into a failing school and you will find weak leadership” (p. 64).

Marzano (2003) identified factors that influence student achievement in an indirect way at the school level, student level and teacher level. At the school level, the principal establishes the policies and practices. At the student level, the principal establishes a school culture that is conducive to learning. Finally, at the teachers’ level, the principal as an instructional leader support the teachers with their classroom management and teaching strategies.

In their study, Blase and Blase (2000) found that effective principal practices are the ones where the principal respects the teacher’s knowledge and abilities, model good teaching skills, communicates openly with the teachers, acknowledges the difficulties of growing and changing, asks the teachers’ opinion, develops a relationship of openness where teachers don’t feel threatened when they make mistakes, and promotes professional development and teamwork. Murphy et al. (2006) see that leadership behaviour does not affect student achievement directly, however, their direct effect is on curriculum, instruction, values, knowledge, and skills that eventually leads to student success.

Few researchers discussed the elements of effective leadership in early childhood and found that effective leadership is a key element for effective early childhood provision (Muijs et al., 2004; Harris et al., 2002; Rodd, 2005).

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006), studied effective leadership in the early childhood setting and highlighted the following practices:

- having a vision and articulating it
- having shared understanding and goals
- communicating effectively
- reflecting and encouraging others to reflect
- offering ongoing professional development
- constantly monitoring and assessing practices
- distributing leadership
- building a learning community and team culture
- encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships
- balancing between leading and managing

Solly (2003) believed that enthusiasm, passion, inspiration, and advocacy are leadership qualities in early childhood, Whalley (2005), believed the ability to influence the staff as an important element of leadership. Similarly, (Carr & May, 2000) believed that leadership quality is the most important aspect in an early childhood setting as leaders are responsible for providing a nurturing environment for parents, staff and children (Carr, Johnson, & Corkwell, 2009). According to Rodd (2003), the key elements of effective early childhood leadership is the ability to: “provide vision and communicate it; develop a team culture; set goals and objectives; monitor and communicate achievements; and facilitate and encourage the development of individuals” (p. 3). Henderson–Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) described effective leadership in early childhood as requiring different ‘wisdoms’ including people wisdom, emotional wisdom, role wisdom and resource wisdom. While, being culturally sensitive, and having strong communication skills. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) discussed the tools that early childhood leaders should have, as including staying informed of current issues, understanding legislation, and policymaking.

The Roles of Leaders in the Organizational Context

Most policies and practices in early childhood are derived from the primary and secondary education (Ho, 2011). Thus, to understand the role of early childhood leaders we need to understand the role of primary and secondary leaders as they perform their principalship role.

Role of the K-12 Principal

Historically, the role of the principal was managerial rather than instructional. Before the No Child Left Behind era, the principal was expected to run a well-structured organization where norms and traditions are maintained (Portin, Alegano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). Schools were run like regimented institutions that resembled a “well-oiled machine.”

Today principals are expected to be ‘change agents’ as well as instructional leaders, and this expectation places new demands on them (Hallinger, 1992). Colvin (2007), Hess and Kelly (2007), Leithwood et al. (2004), and Portin (2004) identified seven characteristics of a contemporary principal’s role. First as a human resources manager responsible for recruiting, hiring and firing personnel as well as coaching, mentoring and providing professional development for the staff. Second, as a cultural leader, he/she manages student behavior through effective discipline procedure and influences the school climate as well as creates the school culture (Colvin, 2007). Third, as a public relations person, the principal influences the perception of the community on the school (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Fourth, as a manager of external development, the principal promotes the image of the school to the public to secure external funds (Portin, 2004). Fifth, as the financial manager, the principal is responsible for balancing the budget, raising funds and cutting costs (Portin, 2004). Sixth, the principal is the strategic

planner promoting the school's "vision, mission, and goals" (Portin, 2004, p. 17).

Finally, as an instructional leader, the principal oversees academic performance, serves as a role model for teachers, supervises curriculum and provides appropriate resources (Leithwood et al., 2004). Davis et al. (2005) found through research that there are three important aspects of the principal's job: "developing a deep understanding of how to support teachers, managing the curriculum in ways that promote student learning, and developing the ability to transform schools into more effective organizations that foster powerful teaching and learning for all students" (p.6).

The principal plays many roles as reflected in the literature review. For example, according to Acheson, (1985), the principal is responsible for public relations, health and safety, behavior management and curriculum planning. In addition to these roles, the principal is also the financial officer (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Gorton & Schneider, 1991), a human resource manager, an evaluator of staff and programs and a maintenance supervisor (Garubo & Rothstein, 1998).

There are great differences between the role of principals in Western countries and those in African and Muslim countries. The role of the principals in developing countries focus on routine management, maintenance, and performance appraisals. Leadership functions such as, staff and curriculum development, parental involvement, vision, and mission have not been observed (Oplatka, 2004).

In Lebanon, principals working in government schools are expected to select textbooks, set schedules, supervise tests and examinations, report to the supervisors, set budgets, provide staffing and oversee maintenance needs. While the private school principal's role includes hiring and evaluating teachers, encouraging parent involvement and setting school policies- especially those related to student behavior management

and discipline (Akkary, 2013). Mattar (2012) also concluded that in Lebanon, training and qualifications are not a must to be a principal. It is often assumed that good teachers make good leaders. In another qualitative study by Akkary and Greenfield's (1998) on the role of the principal in a Lebanese secondary school, found that principals view themselves as managers rather than instructional supervisors.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), principals do not have decision making authority in their schools due to the structure of power in the country, which results in lack of innovation and no proactive management (Shaw, Badri, & Hukul, 1995).

Instructional leadership is rare in most developing countries as principals perceive themselves more of administrators and managers than instructional leaders. In Kuwait, the principal is not involved in curriculum decisions as they don't see that as part of their job (Al-Jaber, 1996b).

In Summary, the principal's role in Western countries is more democratic, participative, visionary, goal-oriented, where there is shared power with teachers, delegation of tasks and responsibilities to teachers, staff development, formative evaluation of teachers, and parent involvement. Whereas in non-western countries, such as Africa, Muslim countries, and Mexico, principals are more likely to "employ autocratic, non-participative, summative evaluation." (Oplatka, 2004, p. 223).

Role of the Early Childhood Leader

There is an abundance of literature on the role of the principal in K-12 education but little on early childhood leadership. Thornton (2011) believed that early childhood leadership is an underexplored area of research. Leading an early childhood center or program bears some similarities to leading in a K-12 school. However, the nature and context of early childhood is unique and need to be examined more closely (Thornton,

Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009). While current literature discusses the role of the early childhood director on a day-to-day basis, the literature does not address the role these directors play in the school community. Thornton (2009) believes that there is a difference between leading and managing an early childhood center. A manager is responsible for the day-to-day details and tasks to run a smooth operation, while a leader is more visionary who doesn't just manage the day-to-day tasks but rather moves forward with the school's mission and vision (Thornton et al., 2009).

Most of the available research suggests that early childhood leadership involve multiple roles and responsibilities, which lead to role conflict and frustration (Caruso, 1991; Jorde-Bloom, 2003; Rodd, 1997, 2006). According to the NAEYC- National Association for the Education of Young Children (2006) administrators in early childhood education are responsible for the entire program from its design to the daily work with children. With this in mind, researchers agree that early childhood administrators have the most demanding yet rewarding job in the field (Catron & Groves, 1999; Freeman & Brown, 2000; Jorde-Bloom, 1997; Rodd, 1997). What's more, early childhood leaders are responsible for the following areas: professional self-knowledge, child development and early childhood curriculum, organizational development, administration and leadership, parent communication and relationship, and research technology (Jorde-Bloom, 2000a, 2003; Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer, 1992).

In an attempt to answer the question: 'What do early childhood directors need to know to succeed?' Brown and Manning (2000) suggested four areas of knowledge: 1) knowledge of others, 2) knowledge about organizations, 3) knowledge about the external world that surrounds the children's program, and 4) knowledge of self.

Reckmeyer (1990) believed that knowledge of others entails the ability to build one-to-one relationships with children, parents and teachers while knowing the organization is the ability to effectively communicate with parents and staff, Bloom (1998) believes that an effective director has the ability to understand teachers and personnel and build a positive environment. Finally, Culkin (1994) identified three behaviors that imply the director's self-knowledge which include: valuing human relationships, developing a communication system, and implementing participatory planning.

Scholars agree that an early childhood principal should possess both managerial and leadership skills. Having a dynamic vision without the ability to manage will hinder principals from achieving their goals. On the other hand, a principal with good managerial skills but lacking the leadership skills will not be able to be innovative, 'see the big picture' and lead the staff towards success. (Carr, Johnson, & Corkwell, 2009). Carr et al. (2004) stated that leaders should focus on several important dimensions of leadership. These dimensions are: responsibility and initiative, vision and values, integrity and execution, mutual respect and benefit, mutual understanding, creative cooperation, and renewal. Nupponen's (2005) meta-analysis on international leadership revealed six roles and responsibilities of early childhood leaders. These responsibilities are: to create a professional environment, maintain good interpersonal skills, manage and direct people to shape the organization, provide quality early childhood education, ensure good learning outcomes, and finally guide staff and monitor all activities. As for Rodd (2006), she believes that the main responsibilities of an early childhood leader are to coordinate "time, talent and task" (p.26). Jorde Bloom (2000) on the other hand, described leadership responsibilities as reflecting self-awareness and professional awareness, as well as having the ability to manage the financial and legal aspect of the

center along with human resource management, curriculum and programming background, maintenance, marketing and public relations. Scrivens (2003) identified several leadership tasks for early childhood leaders, which include: management of people (staff and parents); central management- program design and curriculum mapping; monitoring children and adults; management of human resources; fiscal management; and safety and maintenance.

A qualitative study by Bloom (2000) focusing on the early childhood director's views of their roles, revealed three main themes: the first theme was the multitasking- which they dubbed as "the juggler"- as their job entailed balancing multiple tasks and responsibilities; the second theme was nurturing and protecting; and third theme was making connections. Bloom (2000) stated, "These are important themes because they provide an explanatory framework for understanding the management philosophy of many early childhood directors as well as many of the role-related stress issues that confront directors" (p. 71).

Morgan (2000) identified eight competencies for the early childhood director. These competencies are: planning and implementing an age-appropriate program for children and families; developing and maintaining an effective organization; planning and implementing an effective administrative system that carries out the mission and goals of the program; administering an effective personnel program for staff management and development; fostering good relations within a community; and influencing the policymakers; maintaining the physical facility; having the necessary legal knowledge for effective management; and managing the financial aspect of the program. According to Morgan (2000), these competencies are necessary to run a quality early childhood program. In their study, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years*

Study (ELEYS), Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) also identified core competencies for the early childhood program directors, which include: having a clear vision that is shared and understood by all stakeholders; having an effective communication system that encourages reflection; building a learning community and facilitates a partnership with the parents; and having a balance between leading and managing.

In summary, effective early childhood leaders should possess:

- managerial and leadership skills
- effective communication skills with parents and staff
- knowledge of child development
- knowledge of early childhood curriculum in all its aspects
- cultural sensitivity to cater for the diverse needs of the children and their families
- knowledge of the safety and maintenance procedures specifically in an early childhood setting
- knowledge of early childhood policies and ability to influence these policies

The following section explores how principals are prepared to fulfil their role and responsibilities.

Principal Preparation

As mentioned in the previous section, the school principals' job has become quite a complex one, as they are required to face unprecedented challenges, responsibilities and managerial tasks. Moreover, the principals encounter high pressure in terms of accountability and meeting standards especially as governments and the

parents place high expectations on schools and in turn principals as well (Bush, 2008). Are preparation programs equipping them with the necessary skills to play the role?

What scholars recommend, is the need for college professors to plan programs that prepare principals to be effective leaders as well as be able to develop themselves and others professionally (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2007; Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Donaldson, 2008; Lugg & Shoho, 2006; Peterson, 2002). Davis, et al. (2005) indicate that effective preparation programs are “research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and are structured to enable collaborative activity between the program and area schools. Despite existing consensus, empirical evidence for the impact of these features is currently minimal” (p.8).

West-Burnham (2003) identified a list of strategies for leadership development. These include:

- Learning activities that are based on problem-solving in real-life situations;
- Reflection on actual experiences based on appropriate feedback;
- Challenge derived from new ideas, confronting performance etc.;
- Coaching to help mediate the perceived gap between actual and desired performance;
- The creation of a community of practice to support the above (p. 58).

Traditionally, the principal preparation programs focused on evaluation, supervision and management practices (Houle, 2006). There was little on student learning, curriculum development, effective teaching, and organizational change (Elmore, 2000). Research indicates that these programs do not prepare principals to the reality of the job (Fry et al., 2005; Roza, Cielo, Harvey, & Wishon, 2003; Schulman,

Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). In his research on the effectiveness of field experiences, Dodson (2009) concluded that the fields that proved to be most effective in preparing principals are ‘hands-on experiences’ where students are given the chance to practice actual day-to-day responsibilities carried by the school principal. The study also found that having a mentor and shadowing other principals are among the useful practices for principal preparation.

However, as a study by the Southern Regional Education Board (2005) concluded, principal preparation programs are falling short on that- they stated, “While a few universities have excelled at redesign, [however] the majority fall short of implementing the conditions necessary to create high-quality programs centered on preparing principals who can lead improvement in student achievement” (p. 8).

Most universities do not require a lot of curriculum and instruction studies. Courses do not include some of the important skills for school leadership such as data analysis to improve instruction, effective teaching strategies, and standard alignment and curriculum mapping (Kronley, 2000; & Sykes, 2000). According to LaMagdeleine, et al. (2009), “The lack of a clear understanding about what educational leadership preparation programs should be and what content, instructional methods, and structures should frame them is at the heart of this tension.” (p. 130). Hess and Kelly (2007) state, “Meaningful reform of principal-preparation programs must ensure that the content of these programs is well suited for the challenges confronting principals in a new era of schooling” (p. 269).

Although leadership programs are falling short on producing ‘good’ leaders, a lot of research agrees that there are core leadership competencies that could produce effective leaders. These competencies are: implicit knowledge, practical and

experiential components, mentoring, and networking to support continuous development. These leadership experiences should focus on five key functions: teaching and learning strategies, a culture that facilitates good performance, managing stakeholder relationship, managing systems and structures, and managing an effective environment (Childress, Elmore, & Grossman, 2006). Other topics that leadership programs must address as scholars point out are “scientific-based” such as research, accountability for teacher quality and using data and research for school improvement (Styron & LeMire, 2009). Giber, Carter, and Goldsmith (2000) identified features that have the most impact on a preparation program for developing aspiring leaders which are:

Combining action learning, 360-degree feedback, and clear links to senior-level strategy and commitment [These] leadership initiatives are successfully building teams of leaders who see both the forest and the trees; who can understand their customers’ demands today and drive strategy and action to anticipate their demands tomorrow” (p. 447).

Finally, nowadays school principals are expected to play myriad roles starting from being the change agents to being instructional leaders with expertise on curriculum and assessment matters, to managing the budget and maintaining the facility and reaching out to the community (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). To be able to handle all these responsibilities, the researchers suggest a field-based training and internship which provides the future leaders with authentic context experience (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2007; Davis, et al., 2005).

However, as prospective principals are subjected to a relevant body of knowledge and skills to meet the demands of a leadership and management driven job, the ‘principal preparation’ situation has witnessed improvement over the last decade

(Oyugi, 2015). In the US and Australia, the principal preparation programs are aligned with agreed professional standards and they have emphasized theoretical as well as field-based knowledge and later provide further assistance to certified principals by offering them mentoring and career support (Jacobson, McCarthy & Pounder, 2015; Watterston, 2015; Winn, Anderson, Groth, Korach, Pounder, Rorrer, & Young, 2016).

This next section discusses how early childhood leaders are prepared for their demanding role and examines the extent of their professional development.

Preparation and Professional Development of Early Childhood Leaders

Bloom (1992) defined early childhood directors as the “gatekeepers to quality” who set the standards for everyone to follow. Though there is a general agreement that the director sets the tone for the program and is responsible for the quality of care and education offered in the center, there is a lack of agreement on what constitutes a good training program (Decker & Decker, 1984; Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Peters & Kostelnik, 1981; Greenman & Fugue, 1984).

Early childhood leadership positions are not necessarily given to those who completed leadership training, but are sometimes attained for other reasons, such as experience and good teaching skills (Carter & Curtis, 1998). Most early childhood leaders acquire the job of directors, principals or coordinators due their longevity in the field or their excellent performances as teachers and not because of the knowledge and skills they have acquired through the leadership programs (Caruso, 1991; Jorde-Bloom, 1997, 2003; Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006; VanderVen, 1999).

However, researchers agree that the paucity of early childhood leadership training programs caused the field to be lacking in higher order leadership skills such as

mentoring and advocacy (Lam, 2000). They argue that good teaching skills and knowledge base does not necessarily translate into good leadership skills (Anthony, 1998). Muijs et al. (2004) contend that “in contrast to their counterparts in primary and secondary schools, directors have had plenty of opportunity in their training to become familiar with issues of child development, assessment, classroom management and curriculum design, but not with management or leadership” (p. 164).

Studies in different countries on early childhood leadership preparation reported the lack of leadership, which is perceived as an identified challenge in early childhood (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Nupponen, 2006; Rodd, 1998). Though, it is a known fact that teacher training is quite good in Early Childhood Education (ECE), however this training does not make up for the lack of leadership training- as those playing this role need appropriate training, support, and development in order to work collectively as team of leaders of other adults in educational institutions (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Geoghegan, Petriwskyj, Bower, & Geoghegan, 2003; Hard, 2004; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Rodd, 1998, 2001; Schomburg, 1999; Smith, 2005). This lack of preparation for assuming leadership roles in early childhood education is a contributing factor to the low profile early childhood leaders experience (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Muijis et al. (2004) believe that early childhood leaders are unprepared for the management role they assume due to this lack of support, and they suggest that more funds should be raised for research into their professional development. Many early childhood directors feel stressed, as they have to assume a myriad of responsibilities that they are not prepared for (Berk, 1985; Jorde-Bloom, 1982).

As such, Caruso (2000) stated that directors and supervisors learn through trial and error rather than proper training that causes them a lot of torment and anxiety.

Other researchers suggest that most of the training these leaders get is on the job (Caruso, Freeman, & Brown, 2000; Jorde-Bloom, 1997; Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer; Muijs et al., 2004; Nupponen, 2006; Poster & Neugebauer, 1998).

However, effective leadership does not just happen; it is a blend of knowledge and experience. Research has shown that effective training is training that focuses on the needs of the participants, happens over a period of time, and addresses specific program concerns (AACTE, 1986; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987). Because leaders are influential role models for teachers, their training and development cannot be haphazard. Workshops that occur sporadically and tackle only broad topics have little impact on shaping the behavior of directors. As recommended by the NAEYC (2006)-National Association for the Education of Young Children), early childhood directors need to have a minimum of a Baccalaureate degree in early childhood or child development, and three years of experience as teachers of young children. However, leaders in the early childhood field believe that early childhood directors should also get training on program administration, management and leadership skills, financial management and staff management as these skills cannot be acquired from experience alone (Bloom, 1992).

Conclusion

There is scarce research on early childhood leadership in the MENA (The Middle East and North African) region, and little or no attention is paid to the roles that early childhood administrators play as well as the best practices for preparing them as leaders. Extensive online research has been conducted using Google Scholar, Shamaa website, AUB library with all possible online resources, the UNESCO website, and the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) site for theses and dissertations and found a

lot of studies on early childhood development in the region but nothing on early childhood leadership except for one recent study by Al Amine et al. (2015) on early childhood pedagogical leadership in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The results of the study indicate that only a small number of early childhood leaders practice their leadership role in full, which encompasses, elaborating a vision and mission, having a decision-making authority with no limitations, building relationships with the community, and involving them in the decision-making process. However, in most cases, the early childhood leaders play a managerial role rather than a leadership one in the KSA early childhood programs.

There is also lack of understanding of who early childhood leaders are and how they make meaning of their role as leaders (Wise & Wright, 2012). There is a need for data that can help us understand the status of early childhood leaders in the Middle East and the experiences that have informed, shaped and enhanced their leadership.

As there is limited research on early childhood leadership in the Middle East and little understanding of the enactment of leadership in the field, this researcher is concerned with three particular aspects of early childhood administration.

First, examining at early childhood leaders' career history and the process of becoming early childhood administrators. Second, investigating their perspectives on their role in leading and managing an early childhood program in their respective region; and third, exploring the formal and informal professional experiences that have contributed to their professional learning and readiness to perform their role. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to portray their 'voices', concerns, and professional needs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study explored early childhood leadership in the Middle East and North African region. It examined the perspective of ten female early childhood leaders from various Arab countries to better understand how these leaders managed their departments or centers considering that there was a lack of early childhood leadership based preparation program in the region. The hope is to understand the expectations and demands of the early childhood leaders' role and the experiences and how these experiences enhance or hinder their leadership growth. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the leadership practices that are deemed effective by these leaders, making a first installment of culturally grounded understanding of this leadership role.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What formal and informal professional experiences have early childhood leaders had that have contributed to:
 - a. Gaining access to the position?
 - b. Enhancing their professional learning and preparing them to perform their role?
2. What do early childhood leaders perceive as necessary skills and knowledge that leaders need to acquire to fulfill this role?
3. What is the nature of the role of the early childhood administrators in the MENA region from the perspective of the persons who carry out this role?
4. What are the challenges that the early childhood leaders in the MENA region faced?

Research Design

The research design for this study is basic, interpretive qualitative research. A qualitative research approach is defined as the approach where researchers construct their understanding by interpreting the responses of the participants (Creswell, 2003). There is a great need to develop a theoretical understanding of the role of the early childhood leaders in the MENA region by taking into consideration the sociocultural conditions under which those leaders are operating.

Additionally, Merriam (2009) states that researchers conducting basic qualitative research would be primarily interested in “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). In this study, the researcher is interested in how early childhood leaders understand their role and their views on what are the experiences that led them to be successful in this role. Additionally, Merriam (2015) believes that qualitative research could provide a better in-depth understanding of leadership practices, processes, and techniques in the education field than the quantitative research cannot.

Grounded theory was the chosen research method as early childhood leadership in the MENA region has not been researched, thus little is understood about it and the purpose is to derive a theoretical understanding from early childhood leaders' experiences. Grounded theory is built through the ongoing collection and careful analysis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) contend that “Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship to each other” (p.23). The researcher is hoping to develop this theoretical understanding of essential experiences of effective early childhood leadership in order to provide a theoretical framework for policymakers and practitioners.

The grounded theorist collects an adequate stock of data from field research and interviews (Morse & Field, 1995). This data is perceived as a potential indicator of a phenomenon. The researcher then focuses on the detailed description of the collected data to find the relevant features related to the social phenomena studied and begins to hypothesize the relationship among the data. Once the data is accumulated and analyzed, the researcher develops the grounded theory. An emerging grounded theory provides a detailed description of the area under investigation which could pave the way for further discussions for interested researchers, or those researchers serve as a change agent in the field being investigated (Martin & Turner, 1986).

The grounded theory is founded on the work of Blumer (1986) and symbolic interactionism (Lewis & Smith, 1980). Symbolic interactionists believe that human beings react to situations based on its meaning to them, this meaning is derived from their social interaction with each other and each individual interprets it in his/her own way and reacts accordingly (Blumer, 1986). In social interactionism, human reality is not “out there” but rather it is continuously evolving as it is connected to the social life (Hutchinson, 1986). This philosophy underlies the grounded theory research, as the researcher tries to interpret a given situation from the perspective of the “participants” then relate it to the social structure as it is understood by those participants (Huthinson, 1986). Glaser and Strauss (1967) believed that grounded theory does not make a statement about what the reality is but rather it elicits an understanding of the patterns in which social interactors relate to each other and how these patterns construct reality.

Selection of Participants

The researcher collected data from ten female leaders from four Arab countries: Lebanon, Egypt, UAE, and Oman. These leaders have held the position of head of school, director, principal, or administrator in an early childhood setting for more than five years. The intent is to provide an understanding of the role of early childhood leaders in the MENA region and a broader commentary on what it takes to fulfil this role in early childhood programs. The researcher also included herself as one of the participants following the autoethnography tradition (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Cole and Knowles (2001) define autoethnography as a research design that “places the self within a sociocultural context. Autoethnography uses the self as a starting point or vantage point from which to explore broader sociocultural elements, issues or constructs” (p. 16). Including oneself adds a reflective and personal dimension to the research. Tieney (1998) stated that “We reveal ourselves in the text as a narrative character, not as an act of hubris but as a necessary methodological device to move us toward a newer understanding of reality, ourselves, and truths” (p. 56). Hubris meaning an ancient Greek context describes behaviours that are defies the laws. When a researcher uses the principles of autoethnography to understand the experiences and to critically reflect on one’s practices and compares them to the others, it provides a “deeper and broader understanding of the issues and strategies discussed” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 225). Other scholars have used and recommended the use of autoethnography as a tool to broaden the understanding on several issues (Anderson, 1996; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Dews & Law, 1995; Ellis, 2004; Franzosa, 1999; Jackson, 1995; Knowles, Cole & Presswood, 1994; Meneley & Young, 2005; Schoem, 1991).

The participant sample was developed through snowball sampling. The researcher used multiple strategies to recruit participants. Three potential participants were initially

identified from Lebanon, Egypt and UAE and each of them was asked to identify others they considered as experienced early childhood leaders and were willing to participate in this study. Participants ranged in age from thirty-two to fifty-five years of age. Only one of the participants had participated in a leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE) preparation program, one participated in non-degree based leadership in ECE preparation program, five participated in ECE undergraduate degree programs, two had a Montessori certification and one had a doctorate in psychiatry. The participants' years of experience in the field ranged from six to twenty years. Participants worked in various countries and are currently based in the MENA region. On the following page, Table 3.2 provides a summary of the ten participants' background education and experience as derived from document review.

Table 3.1.

Participants' Background Education and Experience

Code	Highest Level of Education	Early Childhood Certification	Major	Years Of Experience As Early Childhood Director	Place Of Work (Region)	Type of Leadership Training
D1	Doctoral Degree	30 CE in Play Therapy Intensive study course of the Reggio Emilia approach	Counseling Psychology	13 years	Egypt	None
D2	Bachelor's Degree	Montessori Diploma	French	20 years	Egypt	None
D3	Bachelor's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	26 years	Egypt	Diploma Educational Leadership and Management
D4	CACHE level 5	Early Childhood CACHE level 3	translation/ English Language	6 years	UAE	Early Childhood Administration CACHE level 5
D5	Master's Degree	Montessori Certificate	Law		UAE	Educational Leadership and Management MA
D6	Master's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early childhood Education	16 years	UAE	Took Few Leadership Course When Studying For The MA In Early Childhood
D7	Bachelor's Degree	Early Literacy Diploma	Economics	29 years	Egypt	None Based Degree Early Childhood Leadership Training (Degree in a field different from education)
D8	Master's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	15 years	Lebanon	None
D9	Bachelor's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	29 years	Lebanon	None

D10	Bachelor's Degree	Early Childhood Teacher Certification	Family Science	7 years	Oman	None Based Degree Center Director Pre-Service Training
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Note: Only five of the participants have an early childhood background and the others have different educational backgrounds.

The following section examines how data was analyzed for this research.

Data Collection

In grounded theory, there is no specific technique for data collection; however, this approach encourages multiple sources of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In this study, the researcher collected data from two sources, resumes of the participants, their job descriptions, along with some of their written work and in-depth participant interviews. Interviewing is one of the most popular data collection tools in qualitative research as it provides a better insight into the world of the interviewee (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Maynard, 2000). Seidman (2006) stated that in-depth interviewing helps the researcher understand the meaning people make of their experiences.

Document Analysis

The participants submitted, via email, a current resume, which was reviewed to gain a basic understanding of their professional history and the professional experiences they have had that led to their current leadership position. They were also asked to provide their job description to further understand their roles and responsibilities and any form of communication between them and the parents and teachers to provide a deeper understanding of their leadership vision and role.

Table 3.2.

Documents Reviewed

Documents type	Purpose
Job Description	The overall role of the early childhood leader
Communication letters	Newsletters sent to parents, teacher communication letters, Correspondence between home and school, Handbooks
Resumes	Educational and experiential background of the early childhood leaders

Participant Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants to understand their experiences and how they interpret those experiences. According to Hutchinson (1986) “Interviews permit researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and to take into account the "lived" experience of participants.” (p.124). The interviews were guided by open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to tell their own story the way they see it (Clark & Creswell, 2010). Probing questions were used when deemed necessary to elicit further detail. The interview questions were designed to answer the four research questions posed for this study. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants.

To ensure the validity of the instrument and make sure that the questions are not misleading, the researcher sought the help of colleagues to refine the questions for clarity. The informants provided feedback about the flow of the question protocol and

familiarity of the terms used in the interview questions. Their feedback was taken into consideration to revise and rewrite the questions (see questions in Appendix A.)

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in preparation for analysis and coding. Also, the documents collected, such as resumes and background experiences were analyzed and categorized to find emerging themes that would help answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the first step of data analysis is coding. As Charmaz (2006) defines it “Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and account for each piece of data” (p. 43).

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), coding involves:

Interacting with data (analysis) using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts that stand for this data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions (p. 66).

The data was analyzed and coded using the “constant comparative method” which is considered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the way to develop a theory grounded in data. Tesch (1990) explains it as an intellectual tool where:

The method of comparing and contrasting is used for practically all intellectual tasks during analysis: forming categories, establishing the boundaries of the categories, assigning the segments to categories, summarizing the content of each category, finding negative evidence, etc. The goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns (p. 96).

Accordingly, the researcher used the hierarchical coding process: the initial coding, focused coding, and axial or theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Initial codes are defined by Charmaz (2006) as “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (p.48). In this stage, the data was collected, coded and analyzed

word for word and line for line to generate concepts without the preconception of the researcher.

The next stage was focused on coding which required the researcher to make decisions about the initial data where the significant and most frequent were categorized completely (Charmaz, 2006).

The final stage was axial coding where the data was brought back together to form a coherent whole (Charmaz, 2006). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding answers questions such as “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” (p. 125). In answering these questions, the researcher converted text into concepts by linking the categories and understanding the relationship between them. Glaser (1978) believes that Axial or theoretical coding “weave the fractured story back together” (p. 72)

This next section looks into the criteria adopted to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the results.

Quality Criteria

The critics of qualitative research are reluctant to accept its trustworthiness though there are rigorous frameworks in place to ensure quality (Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981), a naturalistic researcher has proposed four criteria that qualitative researchers should pursue to have a trustworthy study which include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility is where the researchers need to demonstrate their accuracy in portraying the picture. According to Merriam (1998) credibility is the ability to match findings with reality. To ensure credibility the researcher used several methods such as, familiarizing oneself with the interviewees by meeting with them informally before starting the formal interviews, adopting a well-

established research method which is open-ended interviews, and the use of the triangulation method where there were multiple sources of data collected. First, the interviewees submitted their resumes and background experiences, second the interviews were taped, and third, the data was analyzed and given to the members of interest to be checked for accuracy.

The second criterion is transferability whose concern is to what extent is one finding transferrable to another setting (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 1998; 2002). To enhance transferability of results the researcher used participants from different countries, which offered a variation of results and provided a thick description of the phenomena under investigation to provide a better understanding for readers. The researcher also provided a detailed description of the background and context of the participants, which will help situate the results in the larger picture and assist future researchers in determining whether and how they can transfer the results to their settings.

The third criterion is dependability where the researcher needs to employ techniques to show that if the research is to be replicated in the same context, with the same methods the results obtained will be the same (Ashton, 2004). To ensure dependability, the researcher used the assistance of a colleague and the advisor to check the coding process as well as described the process of the study in details to allow others to replicate it.

The fourth criterion is conformability which is concerned with the objectivity of the researcher (Ashton, 2004). Here steps must be taken to ensure that the findings reflect the work and experiences of the informants rather than the preferences of the researcher. The researcher kept checking for understanding during the interviews and

randomly selected two of the interviewees to check if the coding reflects their experiences. As the researcher is included as one of the informants her judgment and interpretations were susceptible to bias.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings detailed below are based on the information supplied by ten female ECE leaders from four different countries, which are: Oman, United Arab of Emirates, Lebanon and Egypt.

Professional Experiences of Early Childhood Educators

Research Question 1 inquired about the following: What formal and informal professional experiences have early childhood leaders had that have contributed to them gaining access to the position, enhancing their professional learning, and preparing them to perform their role?

Participants worked in various countries and are currently based in the MENA region. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the background education and experience of the ten study participants derived from document review.

Most of the participants have more than fifteen years of experience.

From this question, two themes emerged from the data: educational backgrounds and journey; and formal and informal leadership preparation for the role, which will be discussed in further detail.

1 Table 4.1.

2 *Participants' background education and experience:*

Code	Highest Level of Education	EC Certification	Major	Years Of Experience As ECE Director	Place Of Work (Region)	Type of Leadership Training
D1	Doctoral Degree	30 CE in Play Therapy Intensive study course of the Reggio Emilia approach	Counseling Psychology	13 years	Egypt	Training Of Trainers
D2	Bachelor's Degree	Montessori Diploma	French	20 years	Egypt	None
D3	Bachelor's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	26 years	Egypt	Diploma Educational Leadership and Management
D4	CACHE level 5	Early Childhood CACHE level 3	translation/ English Language	6 years	UAE	Early Childhood Administration CACHE level 5
D5	Master's Degree	Montessori Certificate	Law		UAE	Educational Leadership and Management MA
D6	Master's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early childhood Education	16 years	UAE	Took Few Leadership Course When Studying For The MA In Early Childhood
D7	Bachelor's Degree	Early Literacy Diploma	Economics	29 years	Pakistan	None Based Degree Early Childhood Leadership Training
D8	Master's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	15 years	Lebanon	None
D9	Bachelor's Degree	Early Childhood Education	Early Childhood Education	29 years	Lebanon	None
D10	Bachelor's Degree	Early Childhood Teacher Certification	Family Science	7 years	Oman	None Based Degree Center Director Pre-Service Training

3 *Note:* Only five of the participants have a background in early childhood education and the rest have different educational background.

Educational Background and Journey

Each of the ten participants described a different educational background leading to their positions as early childhood administrators. There was no consistency in the educational backgrounds among the participants. All of the participants earned an undergraduate degree; however, four participants actually majored in early childhood education while the other six participants' area of expertise varied- this included fields such as psychiatry, French, economics, law, and translation. Two of the participants earned a graduate degree, one is still pursuing a graduate degree, and one participant had a doctorate degree. Three of the participants went through a certification program related to early childhood education. Some of the participants received management or leadership training related to administration of early childhood program, though some were more formal than others.

Clearly, participants in this study joined the early childhood field from various educational backgrounds and hence offered a range of experiences to the leadership roles they held. Some of the participants did not pursue the role but accidentally happened on it because of their passion and belief in early childhood education. As one of the participants (D10) explained, her career as an early childhood leader happened due to circumstances and continued due to passion:

My early childhood education came into play where I was in school (university) and had to transfer back home. So, I changed major to graduate faster and my passion was with early years. I have enough qualification to start working as an early childhood teacher.

Another participant (D1), explained that she started as a pre-school teacher at a very young age and after pursuing other fields she went back to be an early childhood educator. She stated:

I started as a preschool teacher when I was very young like 16 years old. I love this role I love children. I went to medical school after medical school I discovered that I don't want to be a doctor and I want to teach young children.

A third participant (D2) explained that in her case, it was not her years of experience nor years of education but rather her pure passion and a strong vision led to her career in early childhood:

Though I didn't have a previous experience in leading a nursery school, but I had a mission and vision and I strongly believed in it that I convinced the investors to give me the money to start the nursery school.

Four other directors stated that they got the job due to their experience and educational background. These participants worked as early childhood education teachers and did their graduate studies to obtain a master's degree to qualify to apply for the leadership role. As one of the participants (D8) reflected: "I applied, and they got impressed with my CV. I have an Early Childhood degree and an MA in elementary education".

Another participant (D3) who worked as a teacher trainer at the beginning of her career was later offered the leadership position as she explained:

I started as a teacher in kindergarten. Taught for one year then was given the role of early childhood teacher trainer in an in-service training program, where I would train teachers for one year giving those sessions in the classroom and observing them later in their work environment. I did this for six years, which gave me the chance to meet with a lot of school principals and visit many schools. One of the school principals asked me to work as a part-time coordinator of his early childhood section and I accepted.

A third participant (D2) shared that her specialized degree, as well as her experience as a coordinator, got her the leadership position she said:

First of all, I am holding a BA degree in early childhood education and a teaching diploma in elementary education and was teaching the early childhood education program at the university. I was recommended by the university to the school. And the position of a teacher trainer at the university and my previous experiences as a coordinator led to my position as a director.

The Fourth participant, (D5), believed that she became an early childhood leader due to her qualifications, educational background and her experience as a consultant. She explained:

What got me into a leadership role are both my experience and qualification. I worked as a consultant and just stumbled into a new school that was opening and met the principal of the of the early children nursery section. When she realized that I was qualified in the UK specifically Montessori EC she said to me I will build a job around you because she realized my qualifications especially that I worked as a lawyer before I had also been a leader in the legal profession.

Others started as early childhood teachers with no specialized training in early childhood education and later discovered that they liked it, yet realized that it requires its own set of specialized skills if they are to be effective. As a result, they enrolled in various programs such as the Montessori teacher-training program, the British Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education (CACHE) and the Early Literacy Diploma offered by the American University of Cairo. They associated this additional training with being offered the position of director. One of these participants (D4) explained:

I was a good teacher and got a primary supervisor position. After that, I was planning to open my own nursery. Thought that early years is easier than primary then learned that I can't, and it is not easier. So, I studied CACHE 3 then I was offered this position in this school. Head of KG (current position) fourth year.

The participant (D2) related that her university training had nothing to do with early childhood education and pointed out that it was rather her passion that led to her current position. She explained that she sought specialized training after becoming an early childhood leader:

My educational background has nothing to do with my current job. I went to college and studied the French language. Later I studied the Montessori Diploma and opened my own nursery school. I attended a postgraduate one-year course in education then completed a Certificate for Early Childhood Education at the American University in Cairo (AUC).

The above findings indicate the participants came to the role indirectly. Before becoming leaders, most of them were teachers with no leadership experience or training. They learned by trial and error.

Formal and Informal Leadership Preparation for the Role

The participants in this study engaged in varying types, depth and duration of leadership preparation, some of which was organized and intentional and some of which consisted primarily of learning on the job through a mentor or through on the job trial and error experiences.

Three of the participants pointed out that they received formal leadership training at some point during their career. Those who participated in leadership preparation mentioned having gained as a result leadership skills that prepared them for some aspects of the role but not all. Three of the participants believe that experience rather than education played a major role in their preparation. One of the participants (D3) stated:

I learned about leadership styles and how to be able to resolve issues by trying different styles and not sticking to your style. I learned about teacher observation and performance appraisal and a little on curriculum planning but nothing on parent interaction, behavior management, budgeting and policy writing. Most of it I learned by trial and error and through years of experience.

The participant, (D10) believed that leadership preparation was a little bit of both experience and education. She explained:

I think I learned it through a little bit of both because where my degree is not a 100% in education. I learned a lot working with NGO and adoption agencies. Also in Iraq, I went through the two accreditations when they were getting their IB accreditation and ACS accredited and things like that. You had to have a line of professionalism. As far as professionalism getting the US experience helped prepare me to go one way is not enough, having the Middle East experience helped. Though mostly I got it from experience.

The participant (D7): attended few workshops on leadership after she was appointed to the position but asserted that her experience on the job played an equally important role in her preparation. She stated:

I attended a series of workshops on leadership but after gaining access to the position. I was sort of prepared as I had been acting as a year group leader and curriculum coordinator for some time but running a school is a totally different business.

Although she played a leadership role as a team leader, it didn't prepare her for the leadership responsibilities when she took the job of a principal for the early years.

One of the participants (D4) felt that the training she got was not enough and didn't prepare her for her role as an early childhood leader. Some of the skills gained were on assessment of young children, observation skills, recruitment and induction of teachers, but she was missing other needed skills. As she reflected, she said:

I learned that it is important if you are doing activities with children to do risk assessment, I learned induction policy, recruitment policy. Didn't get anything on curriculum or teacher training. I needed curriculum training. They were about observing students and developing their skills but nothing on curriculum. Student management was neutral not much training was given on that.

Although she took leadership training on early childhood, she still felt unprepared for the job as the training program only provided her with policy writing, health and safety, and student observation but lacked the curriculum design which an aspect of the job.

There was only one participant, (D6), who came from an Australian background who felt that the extensive training that she has received in college in addition to completing a series of pre-service professional development workshops left her feeling somewhat prepared for the leadership role. She stated:

When I did my master's degree and it tapped on leadership. In Australia, we had professional development that supports leadership. I would say sound knowledge of the curriculum when they do refresher courses they stress on your strength in curriculum I was very passionate about literacy, so I went into courses in literacy that helped shape me to become a leader in curriculum. I have done courses in interpersonal skills because it was important in leadership, courses in cultural diversity to understand the different cultural needs working with different teachers.

Contrary to the others, the early childhood leader who came from an Australian background, (D6), felt that she was more prepared for the role in terms of curriculum development, dealing with staff, and concentrating on specific aspects of the curriculum that later served her on the job.

In summary, the majority of the participants who took leadership courses or did not, felt unprepared for the roles and responsibilities of the job.

Necessary Skills and Knowledge for Early Childhood Leaders

The second question was the perception of the early childhood leaders regarding the necessary skills and knowledge needed to fulfill the leadership role. With respect to skills and knowledge required to fulfill a childhood leadership role, six themes emerged; they include: communication skills, managerial skills, and interpersonal skills, specialized knowledge in early childhood development, teacher training skills, and understanding of the early childhood curriculum.

Table 4.2.

Frequency of responses on the required skills for early childhood leadership

Themes/Participant	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	Total Count
Communication skills			✓	✓						✓	3
Managerial skills	✓			✓			✓				3
Interpersonal skills	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		6
Specialized Knowledge (ECD)	✓				✓	✓			✓	✓	5
Teacher training skills	✓		✓							✓	3
Knowledge of the Curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10

Note: All the participants believe that knowledge of the curriculum is a required skill while most see interpersonal skills as important.

Communication Skills

Three of the participants said that it was important for leaders to practice effective communication skills with colleagues, parents and to manage one or more staff Members. One of the participants (D4) explained what effective communication means to her saying: “effective communication is the ability to communicate with the administrators as well as parents in a professional manner and to document all communications via emails, newsletters, and forms.” Two of the participants (D3, D9) believed that good communication skills are important to be able to deal with parents, students, and staff. They also believe that leaders should be able to understand parents’

cultural backgrounds to be able to communicate with them. The two participants also pointed out that a leader should be able to differentiate the format of their communication when addressing different audiences. When addressing parents, they need to use simple layperson language but when addressing the teachers, they use scholarly language. D3 added saying:

I learned that parents need to feel that their opinion matters, and their voice is heard. Once they feel valued they develop trust, which eventually makes my job easier. Once mutual respect and trust are developed, it is quite easy to bring them in for parenting sessions to raise their awareness on good parenting practices and help them understand the developmentally appropriate practice.

She believed that there is a need to establish a trustful relationship with the parents where they feel valued and respected. Parents who trust the administrator are more inclined to listen to the advice and guidance given.

The next section examines participant's perspectives regarding managerial skills needed to fulfill a childhood leadership role.

Managerial Skills

All participants seem to be aware that administrators of early childhood education programs are expected to make many managerial decisions each day. Some of which are minor and others major. Three of the participants mentioned explicitly the need for this skill. D1 talked about some of these responsibilities such as: organizing events; setting priorities; planning teachers' daily schedules; planning the substitution schedule; setting deadlines for the staff; posting newsletters and communicating with parents when problems arise. Other managerial skills mentioned in the job descriptions included: conducting interviews for potential employees; supervising the maintenance of all facilities and equipment; identifying and planning future facility needs; developing procedures for transportation; following-up financial and legal details;

keeping all financial and legal documents confidential, well organized, and safe; and following-up of ads and Facebook pages. In sum, the managerial skills required are scheduling, sending communication letters, overseeing maintenance and safety, managing fiscal and budgeting matters.

The next section will review respondents' views regarding interpersonal skills and abilities that most childhood leaders possess.

Interpersonal Skills

According to the respondents, there is a wide variety of interpersonal skills and abilities, such as: listening; managing one's and others' emotions; motivating personnel; communicating effectively; and team building. Six of the participants believed that interpersonal skills are necessary skills in an early childhood setting. They explained that part of their job is to motivate continuously their staff and to listen to them when they needed to talk. As one of the participants, (D3), explained:

All the teachers come to me when they have issues that they need to resolve especially when it is a problem with another colleague and I usually play the moderator and help them work through their issues. Some even come to me with their personal issues and I listen and sympathize.

She believes that her interpersonal skills lie in her ability to listen, whilst maintaining the harmony between the staff, building a team, as well as helping staff with their personal issues if they come asking for such help.

Along the same lines, another participant, (D8), revealed that effective communication, being flexible and open to suggestions were necessary interpersonal skills and abilities needed to fulfill this leadership role. She said: "Talking to teachers on daily basis, discussing things with teachers. Flexibility, being open to other people's opinions" Also, the participant (D9), explained her views on interpersonal skills saying:

I do with them what they like to do. Go out with them. If a teacher smokes I used to smoke with them. I had a good relationship with them. I help them in their time of need. Keep the harmony and not let teachers have an argument. Support teachers and have their back in front of the director and parents. Always smiling. When I go into their classrooms I go to support rather than evaluate. Let the teachers do what needs to be done on her own to develop, let her do the plan and then discuss it with her so she would learn what needs to be done.

She interpreted the interpersonal skills as building a relationship with her staff by spending time socializing with them, engaging in activities that they like to do, supporting and motivating them by allowing them to develop professionally at their own pace.

Following is a review on leaders' opinions pertaining to the significance of specialized knowledge in early childhood development.

Specialized Knowledge in Early Childhood Development

Six of the participants believed that an early childhood leader needs to have a comprehensive specialized knowledge on early childhood development and should also be well informed about the current research in the field to be able to make a well-informed judgment and to be able to serve the families in their centers.

Two of the participants (D1, D9), believed that an academic background in early childhood psychology and knowledge of recent studies is a must to offer the best service to the children and their families.

Another participant (D6) said that knowledge of the early childhood curriculum and the relevant pedagogic knowledge is a must to be able to work with young children.

She elaborated saying:

They must have sound knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. They need to believe and understand the core elements that help the child develop that is the school the family and the community, make sure they understand the life of the child when we are teaching we are not just passing information, but we need to understand this child's background. We need to put on the lens and understand what these 4-year-olds are going through.

Participant (D10) added that early childhood leaders needed to be informed of all past and current research on early childhood and acquaint the teachers with it also:” Knowing what resources are available. Like Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and handwriting without tears. Train the teachers and do workshops introducing school of thoughts. Training teachers, knowing what resources and philosophies are there and a background knowledge of early childhood”. Next, perspectives on teacher training skills will be examined.

Teacher Training Skill

Three of the participants pointed out that an early childhood leader should have the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to their staff and teachers. One of the leaders, (D3), responded as follows:

The staff should be undergoing continuous development to ensure quality and competence. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to train and mentor the teachers. Especially that most of the teachers we hire are not qualified. It is our responsibility to teach them the basics of early childhood teaching and learning. I start from ground zero and teach them child development theories, developmentally appropriate teaching practices, guiding young children, communicating with parents and assessing children. It is like I am giving college courses. However, once they acquire the basic knowledge and necessary teaching skills, we start working together to enhance the knowledge and skills of the new teachers. Later I start using the ‘expert’ teachers how have strength in one area such classroom management to train and conduct workshops to all staff. This technique makes the teachers feel empowered and capable. Once they reach this level, I move to transformational leadership strategies where the teachers start to be part of the decision-making process.

Obviously, this participant moves gradually from directive supervisory behaviors to participative or non-supervisory behaviors when the teachers are well trained and standing on a solid ground- where they can make informed decisions concerning their day-to-day work.

Furthermore, the participant, (D1), added that a leader needs to inspire the staff not just drill them with training sessions. And the participant (D10) said: “teaching the assistants is effective. Making sure that they understand what they are doing and why we do what we do getting them on board for understanding.” She stressed on the importance of training the teacher assistants and not just the teachers to ensure effectiveness and quality teaching in the classroom.

Another participant, (D7), also explained how she has to start from ground zero with the new hires: “I conduct weekly workshops on essentials such as classroom management, discipline, teaching language and phonics, Math, science, storytelling, art and the role play. They are given readings and asked to hand in assignments.”

Participant (D7) explained that these competencies mentioned are all essentials of early childhood curriculum and teaching practices that any qualified teacher should have. The participants see their role as ‘teacher trainers’ and educators where they have to educate the teachers on all matters of early childhood starting from development ending in teaching and assessing and they should do that in a manner that is conducive to adult learning.

The following section looks into early childhood leaders’ views about acquiring specialized knowledge of the early childhood curriculum as it related to their role.

Specialized Knowledge of the Early Childhood Curriculum

All the participants said that having a specialized knowledge of the early childhood curriculum is critical and that developing the curriculum is a major part of the early childhood leader role. One of the participants, (D3), explained:

Curriculum in early childhood depends on the early childhood leader’s philosophy of education and background knowledge as there are no books or specific programs to adopt. It is derived from the various theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, Dewey, and others.

Though the participants come from different countries and educational backgrounds, they all referred to the early childhood curriculum as a program of hands-on activities where children learn through play. They also believed that it is a central part of the early childhood leader to plan this curriculum. As such, they all believed that an early childhood leader should to have a solid theoretical background of the early childhood curriculum in order to develop an age-appropriate curriculum.

Role Responsibilities and Challenges of the Early Childhood Leader

The Third research question inquired about the roles, responsibilities and job expectations of the early childhood leader in the MENA region as well as the challenges that they face on day to day basis. Nine themes emerged under role and responsibilities, and two themes under challenges faced.

The Responsibilities of the Early Childhood Leaders

The themes that emerged from the role of the leader are, monitoring staff attendance, ensuring safety standards, developing the curriculum, training the teachers, recruiting staff, communicating with parents, overseeing the assessment process and editing report cards, ordering resources and managing the budget and student behavior intervention. There was complete agreement among respondents with all of them mentioning the same aspects of the role. Table 4.3, on the following page, shows the frequency of responses on the roles and responsibilities.

Table 4.3.

Frequency of responses on the role of the participants

Themes/Participant	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	Total
Monitoring Staff Attendance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Ensuring Safety Standards	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Developing the curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Observing and Training the Teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Recruiting Staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		9
Communicating with Parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Assessment and Report Cards	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Behavior Intervention	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Budgeting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10

Note: All the participants agreed that early childhood leaders fulfill many of the same roles.

Monitoring Staff Attendance

All the participants believe that monitoring staff attendance is a significant part of the leader's role. They explained that it is their responsibility to identify the needs for substitute teachers, noting that this needs to be done on a daily basis as teachers often call sick unexpectedly on the same morning. When teachers are absent from school, regardless of the reasons for these absences, it presents significant problems especially at early childhood as the students need a stable learning environment. Participant (D1) said: "First thing, she has to be very aware of her staff attendance. Be a good model

come on time.” Emphasizing the importance of monitoring staff attendance by saying that it is the first thing she does in the morning. Another participant, (D5), said:

I would also be in the classrooms every day. Ensuring teachers turned up. Who would be my cover in the classroom if a teacher is absent? Later I created a schedule to make sure that if a teacher is absent another will be slotted.

Ensuring safety standards was a theme that emerged repeated and is examined in the next section.

Ensuring Safety Standards

Ensuring safety standards is found in the majority of the job description documents provided by the participants and during the interview, all of the participants stated that it is one of the most important aspect of their role. All the participants believe that child safety is a priority for all early childhood leaders. One of the participants (D3) explained:

It is my responsibility to ensure that policies and procedures are being followed by all staff to ensure children safety. I have the responsibility to ensure that children are never to be left alone and that all the staff is clear about their roles and responsibilities and confident in carrying them out.

She has to supervise that the staff do understand the safety policies and procedures in order to ensure the safety of the children under their care.

Another participant, (D7), explained:

I am constantly going around the campus to check if there are any safety hazards and then write memos and emails to our maintenance department to inform them of the issue then follow up with them to make sure that it is fixed. Children’s safety is my number one priority. A small splinter in a wooden climbing apparatus could hurt a child using it. It is my responsibility to keep them safe.

The participants are responsible to address all emerging concerns by thoroughly investigating complaints and making sure that action is taken where needed to improve children’s safety. In addition, participants explained that their leadership role requires them to assess potential risks by making outdoor checks on a daily basis to make sure

that it is safe and keep up with indoor and outdoor maintenance. They should be vigilant in enabling children to learn how to keep themselves safe on trips and visits outside as well as within the setting.

The next section explores participants' view on their role in developing the curriculum.

Developing the Curriculum

All the participants view curriculum development as an integral part of their role. They all agreed that they need to write the curriculum objectives, work on the annual plan and the weekly plan as well as train the teachers on implementing it, and closely supervise the instruction in the classrooms.

Three of the directors explained that there is not a single curricular model in early childhood education, but rather a diversity of programs and philosophies. They further explained that some of these programs and philosophies are the Montessori, the Reggio Emilia, the Project Approach, The Creative Curriculum and High Scope, and many more. They mentioned how nowadays there is pressure on achievement, even at this very young age. There is a shift from a focus on all domains of a rounded learning method of childhood development to a specific method of learning that promotes literacy, language, and numeracy. One of the participants (D3) reflected:

It is upon us to do our own research on what is an effective curriculum that is educationally meaningful, fits the children's domains of development, is agreeable to the parents and the teachers are professionally prepared to deliver it." Another participant (D4) said: "We learn all kinds of theories related to how children learn but there are not sufficient directives for curriculum or program design. It's my responsibility to build and construct the curriculum, which I do through research and reading.

Participant (D6), expressed her frustration regarding the diverse approaches to the curriculum in the early childhood field. She said:

I feel that in this region some of the concerns and issues that early childhood face is number one the different approaches to curriculum, I can say this because I am part of an early childhood leadership Middle East committee in Dubai it is a forum in Dubai. So, I get to meet with other leaders from different schools different curriculum from the discussions we learn what they do. And clearly, there is a huge difference in early childhood in this region. Through discussion of different curriculum, I know of schools who teach 4-year-olds from textbooks it is totally different from what we believe in in early childhood as children learn through play. We design a curriculum that is fun, but they are still learning.

With a lack of clearly articulated curriculum and the presence of diverse philosophies and curriculum approaches in the field, the early childhood directors are faced with a challenging task to develop a curriculum that is agreeable to all, administrators, teachers and parents.

The following section examines participants' opinions about teacher training as it is related to their role.

Training the Teachers

All the participants observe and train teachers in their setting. They said that they observe the classroom and examine some of its aspects such as routines, environment, activities, and transitions. They explained that these observations are conducted to make sure that the classroom has a positive learning environment where children have the opportunity to explore a variety of learning materials in a number of settings (e.g. small group, large group, inside, outside). As one of the participants, (D3), noted, it is important to observe for quality teaching and examine whether the classroom environment is conducive to learning or not she explained:

This process includes meeting with the teacher prior to the observation, doing the actual classroom observation and providing feedback on specific areas such as, classroom management, book reading, richness of the centers, teacher interaction with the children and so on. I also provide teaching strategies and we problem solve together ideas for growth and learning.

Part of the teacher training also includes working with individual teachers on their weaknesses to help them overcome it and teaching them to use their strengths and expertise to help their colleagues overcome their weaknesses. Each teacher has weaknesses and strengths, I taught them how to accept their weaknesses and admit them without fear, so they would be more receptive to change and how to celebrate their strength and use it to help other teachers who are weak in this area. Each teacher felt like an expert in her field while training others.

Another participant, (D1), believed that professional development needs to be continuous and that all teachers need to update their knowledge and skills. She thinks it is important to train the teacher assistants and not just the teachers, which requires a systematic professional development plan that sometimes needs to be individualized per teacher. Participant (D8) mentioned the importance of learning about the latest trends in education, sharing, networking and remaining current in the field. The training topics that were mentioned by all the participants included classroom management, instruction, curriculum development, assessment, parent relations, and interactions with other teachers.

The next section examines participants' views regarding their role in the recruitment and staff induction processes.

Recruitment and Staff Induction

Recruiting and hiring qualified teachers, was identified by all respondents as part of the role of the early childhood leader, and was found in most job descriptions. One of the participants, (D3), explained saying:

My role includes screening applicants, scheduling an interview and going through the preliminary interviews. Once interviews are done, I have to identify the best candidates and convince them to accept the teaching position. After the hiring process is done, the newly hired teachers go through an induction program to help them understand the organizational structure and culture, organizational policies and procedures, learn their professional responsibilities and understand our educational philosophy and instructional strategies.

Recruiting and hiring a new teacher is a long process and after hiring them, they have to go through an induction period. Different principals implement different teacher induction strategies. Some assign a mentor to train the teachers and others attend classrooms and engage in regular classroom observations to give feedback. Some of the participants pointed out that they have the final say in the decision whether to hire or not and others need to refer them to the higher management to make the final decision. One of the Participants, (D9), explained:

To recruit teachers for the department, I used to review all candidates' resumes, selecting the best among them. Then I call or send emails to set the first interview appointment. I interview teachers then send rejection letters to those who are not qualified. Later I set another interview with those I approved of with the school principal in my presence. Then I accompany the teacher to the school accountant to inform her about salary and benefits to try to convince her to accept. Then I set the last appointment, which is the signing of the contract.

This principal does most of the human resource department work from calling and setting appointments to sending approval or rejection letter and even goes as far as taking the candidate to the accountant to negotiate the salary. Even then, she does not have the final say as the school principal should interview her too before hiring her.

Another participant, (D7), expressed her frustration towards the hiring process as it does not only take a long time but retaining the hired teachers is a challenge.

As the principal, a big part of the recruitment process falls on my shoulders. The applicants are first preliminarily screened by the head administrator and filtered to me. They come from different backgrounds that are usually not education related. Since contracts here are not strictly abided by, you might find yourself forced to accept a mediocre hiring or keep an average teacher or co. The turnover so far this year has been by midyear has been 5 out 55 or 9%, which is pretty high considering we are midyear. You want to look for good language, presentable looks and certain experience although fresh young woman turned out to be an asset, as you do not have to un-train them first. Once you think she might be a good choice she negotiates her salary with the chief administrator then an email is sent to the Head Office to inform them of the new hiring. The next step after hiring is to try and place them if possible with an experienced teacher who is going to be a good role model and mentor. Then I conduct

weekly workshops on essentials such as class management, discipline, teaching language and phonics, Math, science, storytelling, art and the role of play. They are given readings and asked to hand in assignments.

As the participants explained, they do the recruitment and interviews then leave the salary negotiation to the human resource department. Once they are hired an induction journey into teaching starts. Unfortunately, after all this process, nothing guarantees that the teacher will stay for the whole academic year. Which makes recruitment an ongoing process throughout the year.

Participants also mentioned communicating with parents as an important role, a topic that will be discussed in the next section.

Communicating with Parents

All the participants believe that effective communication with parents is vital in early childhood settings. Good communication can prevent mismatched expectations and encourage cooperation. One of the participants, (D3), believes that keeping in touch with the parents on regular basis to inform them of the various activities and concepts that their children are learning and keeping them involved on day to day basis is a major requirement at the early childhood level especially that children at this age cannot express themselves clearly as she explained:

At this age level, parents are more involved in their children's learning. They want to know whether they slept or not, ate all their food, learned something new today, made a friend or played alone and the list goes on. Children do not like to recite what they did nor do they even remember. Which makes it vital to communicate with parents on regular basis. At our school, we send a monthly calendar of activities, a newsletter, a daily diary that goes home every day and monthly parenting classes. We created a parent handbook with all the policies and procedures as well as general information for the parents that we distribute at the beginning of every school year. We also have two parent conferences a year to discuss their child's progress as well as meetings upon request. And if a child is having difficulty be it academic or emotional, we call the parents in and discuss strategies to help the child. We offer monthly training sessions given by me or the counselor for the parents who need help raising their children.

The means of communicating with parents is mostly the same among all participants. Newsletters and daily dairies are quite common in early childhood settings. Electronic communication is also an effective means of communication with parents such as emails, Facebook postings, and website postings as one of the participants, (D4), explained:

For parents, it is mostly the diary for daily communication and they can talk to me over the phone. We post on digital campus and Facebook. I send events letters and welcome letters and newsletter and weekly plans.

Another participant, (D7), explained her role in parent communication saying:

My role is to be available and maintain an open-door policy, listen to their comments, give prompt feedback, have online, open communication channels, organize events, involve them as volunteers, and enlist them as part of a team.

All participants agreed that in an early childhood setting it is important to be available to parents to answer queries, give advice and training sessions and involve them as volunteers.

The following section reviews participants' perspectives on their role in assessment and report cards.

Assessment and Report Cards

Most of the participants view student assessment as an integral part of their responsibilities. A participant, (D3), explained the process:

My role is to develop standardized assessments, monitor the assessment process especially when the teachers are doing the quarterly assessment for report cards. I monitor the assessment procedure for all areas, such as reading and writing, mathematical concepts, motor skills and social and emotional development. I check the 'grades' for discrepancies within a class or across all classes in the same level. Sometimes I monitor students' progress from year to year. I also edit the general comments that the teachers write on these report cards to ensure that they are written in a correct and plain language and are easily understood by parents. Before the report cards are sent home, I meet with parents whose children are not doing well to inform them as soon as possible of their child's achievement level and rate of progress, and to give them tips and strategies to help at home.

She monitors the assessment process from start to end and is involved in every single detail including meeting with parents and discussing future strategies to help their children. Another participant, (D7), explained her involvement in the process:

I make a timeline for writing comments, sending them to me for editing, filling in the report cards and writing the comments manually then I edit them again for mistakes while they copy. For Kindergarten and Grade one classes, I have assessment weeks where the children have assessment worksheets and oral assessments plus their ongoing assessment. The rest, Toddlers to Prekindergarten, depend only on ongoing formative assessment. I had a workshop on Formative Assessment and photocopied an assessment-tracking sheet to be used in class. I also gave a mini-workshop on writing report card comments and sent them many documents with ready comments to help them with the writing.

She does not only monitor the assessment and report card comments but also train the teachers on how to conduct assessments by giving workshops and writing tips. Daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly assessment help teachers to monitor student learning, make judgments about student achievement and attainment, evaluate the effectiveness of teachers or the curriculum and develop differentiated lesson plans to address the needs of all learners.

The following sections look at how the participants perceived their role with regards to behavior intervention.

Behavior Intervention

All the participants noted that serving as a behavior specialist and/or counselor is one of the responsibilities expected of them by the teachers and the parents. A participant (D3) elaborated saying: “I design, implement, coordinate and evaluate a comprehensive behavior support program. I work directly and aggressively with identified students and help the teachers and parents give the right intervention and support.” Although her field of expertise is not in behavior intervention or special

needs, however, she found herself involved in it and had to read extensively about behavior intervention and partake in related workshops in order to help with the process.

Another participant, (D8), said:

To solve student's behavior problem, I listen to teacher's complaints, go to the classroom and observe the child. Then I sit with the teacher to analyze the child's behavior, discuss and figure out the cause of problem behaviors. We put a plan together a behavior intervention plan to replace problem behavior with more positive ones.

As the participant, she also discovered that even if she does not have the necessary training in behavior intervention, she is considered the one responsible for it.

Of course, she added, it helps having teachers' and parents' support is. Another participant, (D4), explained saying:

Behavior intervention is another challenge in the early childhood as there is no behavior manager or advisor assigned to deal with this age group. When any behavior issue arises, and the teacher can't handle it, they usually refer to me to deal with it. As an early childhood practitioner, I developed my knowledge of dealing with behavioral issues only from experiencing that through a daily practice, but not as a specialist. As every child is a unique child, there is no solution fits all, I have to check the reasons that lead to this behavior, check with parents for any transitions at home or any other issues may cause the behavior then try to solve it with them. Sometimes, the issues turn to be more challenging; it is where a specialized intervention is required. As the school doesn't provide this service, parents should seek this help from outside provider. Here is another challenge; to convince parents with the urgent need to consult a professional.

She considered dealing with severe behavior issues as a challenge, because not only does she have to find ways to help the teacher identify and respond to it, but she also has to convince the parents to seek professional help when the issue is beyond her expertise.

Other participants listed few strategies that they follow such as, work with individual teachers, groups of teachers and/or the entire staff on factors that can affect development and implementation of interventions, maintain a record of student

progress, develop assessment strategies and observation forms to assess student behavior issues, provide recognition of a variety of student accomplishments and positive behaviors, continually supervise students to ensure a safe, non-threatening, nurturing environment where students can thrive and review behavior referrals and data reports.

The next section examines the participants' perspectives on budgeting and resourcing.

Budgeting and Resourcing

All the participants shared the same view on their critical role in managing the budget to equip their indoor and outdoor spaces with the necessary educational resources. The early childhood leaders pointed out that they are responsible for developing a budget that supports the program philosophy, aligns with the needs of the children and is affordable to the school owners. They also explained that finding the necessary resources can be the most challenging part of this process. Budgeting is very important in early childhood setting as students at this stage need a lot of educational resources to teach as most of their teaching is hands-on and requires a lot of stationery, educational games, and outdoor equipment just to name a few. The financial part requires good planning and is done annually. A participant, (D9), explained saying:

Lack of resources was a drawback to the functioning of our preschool department. There was a shortage of everything, materials, stationery, storybooks, teacher resource books, toys and educational games, computers, and Internet access. Being a person who believes that “no matter how skillful a teacher maybe, she will never be able to function at full capacity if there’s a lack of tools holding her back; I had to think of a solution to this problem. The lack of tools was due to the cost of those resources, so I started a fundraising project, planning for activities and sales and involving preschool teachers who were enthusiastic about collecting money for the purpose of providing them with everything they needed. We did some of the projects such as, writing scripts and performing puppet shows, designing and selling fake jewelry, leading several sales for food and snacks, and leading activities for kids like the pajama day, hat

day, mustache day, etc. With the financial support of the school and the teachers' enthusiasm and help, we were able to buy everything we needed for the department.

She went around the restricted budget to create fundraising activities to be able to resource her department with the necessary tools for teaching and learning. This was achieved even though the administration does not understand the importance of assigning a reasonable budget to provide the teachers with the needed resources.

Participant (D7) also expressed the same concerns in terms of acquiring the necessary resources saying:

Resources are in the form of printouts that the teachers have to search for online print, cut and laminate. It is time and effort consuming. The luxury of having a ready phonics game out of a box or a jar of attribute counters is non-existent. You end up using rubbers, beads or any odd thing for counters and putting together your own 'do it yourself' games. Even something as simple as large dice is very hard to find. The toys available as well are either extremely expensive or limited in choice or of poor quality and completely unsuitable like swords, guns, Barbie dolls.

As there is not enough budget to acquire the resources needed, she resorted to 'do it yourself' games to give the children the opportunity to have hands-on educational materials. Some early childhood principals have to be resourceful and think out of the box like fundraising activities or handmade games in order to supply their department.

The next section analyzed challenges that early childhood leaders experience.

The Challenges that Early Childhood Leaders Face

As for the fourth question, the challenges that early childhood leaders faced, most talked about two main challenges: recruiting qualified staff and parental awareness about early childhood issues. This result is depicted in table 4.4.

Table 4.4.

Frequency of responses on the challenges faced

Themes/Participant	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	Total count
Staff recruitment		✓	✓					✓	✓		4
Parental awareness		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	6

Note: Respondents D1, D5, and D6 did not mention challenges faced.

Recruiting Qualified Staff

This presents numerous challenges. Recruiting, selecting and employing early childhood educators can be difficult since early childhood teaching is not always an attractive career choice as one of the participants, (D3), explained. She continued to say that the working conditions, especially in kindergarten, are often relatively unfavorable, in terms of pay and workload. Teachers are expected to teach more number of hours as they are homeroom teachers who stay with the children all day long, teach all subjects and supervise their play time, rest time and lunch hour. In addition, they do not get any corresponding rewards in pay or career progression. With the budget provided for early childhood staffing, it is very difficult to hire qualified staff. Another participant, (D9), said:

One of the challenges I faced, as a kindergarten director, was to find highly qualified early childhood graduates to hire as preschool teachers. Most of the candidates were technical school students who had mediocre standards in terms of language skills and teaching abilities. Those few with a university degree were coming from different fields like nutrition, graphic and interior design. The majority was from those mothers who found themselves unable to tolerate the burden of working for long hours and decided to convert to teaching as a convenient career. Being a teacher trainer, I had to select those with very good language skills and who showed enthusiasm about learning and had them join a one-year training program while practicing the profession as an assistant. As for those with early childhood degree, they were few and were asking for high salaries.

She believes that hiring qualified early childhood educators is difficult due to the low salaries that schools pay early childhood teachers, which in turn makes it her job to find and recruit them.

Another participant, (D7), also explained:

Most of the teachers do not have a Bachelor degree in early childhood education, and their studies are in varied unrelated fields from engineering, to interior design, the closest being a BA in English Literature. Teachers come from various backgrounds and while the young ones see it as a short number of hours, and an undemanding job until they find something else or get married. The mothers see it as a convenient job with regards to hours, holidays and fee discount. You occasionally come across the ones with potential that need some polishing but, in general, you have to work harder to undo some practices and teach more acceptable ones. Postgraduate studies and teaching courses are not very common and the online ones that are reputable are few and pricy.

As there are no clear policies regarding the qualifications of the teachers in early childhood, the participants find it difficult to hire qualified teachers especially that the monetary reward is not motivating enough.

Participants also discussed the nature of parental awareness in guiding and teaching young children, which is the topic of the following section.

Parental Awareness

Six of the participants agreed that parental awareness on guiding and teaching young children cannot be included in what early childhood teachers and leaders consider as an appropriate practice. Early childhood leaders believe that children learn through play and hands-on experiences while parents expect to receive worksheets and homework. Parents expect children to read and write at an early age and hence expect school administrators to begin formal schooling of children as early as preschool age, which in turn places additional pressure on the early childhood leaders to adjust their

curriculum met parents' needs instead of children's needs. One of the participants who serves as a teacher trainer and consultant, (D3), said:

I used to face this problem since I started work twenty-six years ago and what is astonishing is that this problem still exists twenty-some years later where early childhood educators change their curriculum and disregard the developmentally appropriate practice just to please the parents. It is a competition between preschools on whose children can do the three R's earlier! In every workshop I have given, when I talk about hands-on activities and discovery learning, I get stopped by the teachers saying, "We can't do that because we don't have time. We barely have time to finish the books."

The teachers barely have time to finish the worksheets that they are given by the administrators. Another early childhood leader, (D6), said: "the most challenging thing is dealing with difficult parents who think that 'learning through play' and 'nap time' are a waste of time and it is their children's right to be provided with a good education especially that they are paying a lot for the school. Convincing them about what is age appropriate was a big challenge." Parents view 'good education' as reading, writing, and math. They do not seem to understand the developmentally appropriate educational practices for children of this age group. Another participant (D7) said:

Parents are another challenge when it comes to the region. Apart from an elite few, their approach to parenting is quite amateurish. The culture is, unfortunately, a nanny, driver, and screen babysitting one. Their disciplining techniques vary between leaving the kid to do what they want to avoid conflict and putting them in the naughty corner. The parents are also quite demanding and expect the teachers to comply with their demands. They are also too academics' oriented putting a lot of emphasis on such things as writing at an early age, having daily written homework and workbooks as evidence of learning which in turn leads to the school owners pressuring us to include more worksheets and less hands-on.

One of the participants (D7), is dealing with new parents who leave their children with nannies to be raised. They also believe that the more homework the children get the better the program is. They demand to see worksheets and believe it is the only evidence that their children are learning.

A third participant (D9) expressed the same concern where she had to tailor the curriculum to fit what the parents want rather than what is developmentally appropriate:

Another challenge was to tailor a curriculum that is more convenient to parents than to their kids. “Learning through Play” was an unacceptable vision since parents pay a lot of money for the school fees. To do this, their kids have to learn a lot of skills: reading, writing, letters and numbers. In addition to that, children have to go home with a portfolio full of worksheets; otherwise, there will be no proof for parents that their kids are working at school. Moreover, rest time was another waste of time for some parents. They used to complain about not using their child’s time in an efficient way.

Two of the respondent used the same statement where the fee the parents pay is correlated with how formal schooling should be or how fast their children should learn to read and write. This culture is unfortunately present in the region and the lack of parental awareness on developmentally appropriate practice seems to be a major issue of concern to the some of the respondents.

Summary

This chapter included a detailed analysis of the experiences of ten early childhood leaders regarding their educational paths in becoming leaders, how they viewed themselves as leaders, what they believe their roles and responsibilities are, and what are the challenges they faced. Many of the direct quotes from the participants were included to illustrate and describe their insights and views.

The following themes emerged from the data analysis: educational backgrounds, journey and meaning of the position, leadership skills and qualities needed, roles and responsibilities and challenges faced.

The themes derived from similar patterns that were highlighted in the data according to groupings of emergent categories. From these categories, themes were identified in the data. In sum, all participants described the skills and knowledge needed to by an early childhood leader as, communication skills, managerial skills,

interpersonal skills, specialized knowledge in early childhood development, teacher training skills, and understanding of the early childhood curriculum, As for the roles and responsibilities the themes that came up were, monitoring staff attendance, ensuring safety standards, developing the curriculum, observing the teachers and writing performance appraisal, training the teachers, recruiting staff, communicating with parents, overseeing the assessment process and editing report cards, ordering resources and managing the budget and student and behavior intervention. Finally, the challenges that early childhood faced on the job were, recruiting qualified staff, and parental awareness on early childhood issues.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

This study applied a qualitative research design and methods to collect and analyze data for the purpose of building a profile of an early childhood leader in the MENA region and gaining a deeper understanding of how these leaders experienced leadership. The aim was to document how these ten early childhood leaders formed an understanding of early childhood leadership. Grounded theory was used as the methodological approach. Due to the lack of leadership theory applied within an early childhood context, grounded theory allowed the researcher to approach the research so as to generate concepts, rather than validate an existing theory based on the experiences being studied. Sorting and coding of data were employed in the interview protocol in order to address all research questions. This chapter provides a discussion and analysis of the findings of this study. It also offers recommendations for practice and future research.

Four major themes emerged from the data: (a) pathways and experience, (b) the role of the early childhood leader in the MENA region (c) the needed skills required to fulfill the role and (d) challenges faced fulfilling this leadership role. The following section will discuss the findings under these themes.

Pathways to Leadership

Becoming an early childhood leader is not a career goal that is purposefully pursued by ‘career committed’ and specialized candidates. Moreover, the findings from this research indicated that there is not a single way to become an early childhood administrator. Through the course of the interviews, it was evident that not all the

participants had a background in early childhood education, and only a few received in-service training in early childhood development and curriculum planning; however, none of them experienced a specialized early childhood leadership program.

Most participants in this study did not follow an educational career or pathway related to early childhood leadership, rather they happened on it because they were selected for: having several years of experience as early childhood teachers; being excellent teachers; obtaining a Master's degree in early childhood or any other related field; or met with an investor interested in establishing an early childhood center.

Instead, most participants relied completely on the opportunity to learn while on the job either through the accumulation of individual experience or by enrolling in sporadic in-service training in the form of workshops, informal coaching or mentorship programs. Those who enrolled themselves in a graduate educational leadership program, or participated in workshops that covered domains of educational leadership, felt more prepared.

The lack of career path for EC leaders, scarcity of in-service training and the mere absence of pre-service leadership preparation programs seem to reflect an accepted norm that pertains to preparing educational leaders in the region. In fact, studies of K-12 principals' career path have found similar results, both in terms of purposefully seeking the leadership position as part of a career path, and in terms of providing formal pre-service and in-service training to K-12 principals, which requires competencies for the job- in actuality, the dominant conceptions of leadership do not relate in the Arab region. A study by Karami-Akkary (1997), found that occupants of the principalship position in Lebanese schools do not pursue the principalship as a career goal, rather they happen on the job through political or religious affiliation

rather than through their training or educational backgrounds. Moreover, they rarely conceive of receiving formal leadership training as a requirement to be appointed to an educational leadership position (Karami-Akkary, 1997).

In addition to the absence of leadership preparation programs for early childhood leaders in the Arab region, there is a scarcity of early childhood teacher preparation programs rendering the available level of specialized expertise in these early childhood centers very limited. According to the World Childhood Forum (2015), educational policymakers in the Arab region are yet to direct their efforts to making early childhood education compulsory which led to the minimal funding and attention to improving the quality of educational services in the early childhood education sector. Hence, it comes as no surprise that all of the participants in this study did not get any formal early childhood leadership education before assuming their role.

On the other hand, the results of the study resonate with findings from the international literature. Despite what seems to be an obvious need for early childhood leaders to have a background knowledge in early childhood education, there is still a lack of training for these leaders all around the world- understandably, leading such change, is an issue of policy and politics (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009), As highlighted by Muijs, et al. (2004), early childhood leadership training and development was not considered necessary for early childhood leaders in the Western context. The literature review also indicated that the lack of early childhood leadership preparation programs in different countries is perceived as an identified challenge in early childhood (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Nupponen, 2006; Rodd, 1998). Research drawn from early childhood practitioners in the United States, England and Australia also suggests that there is a serious lack of leadership training and that most early

childhood leaders hold the job accidentally with no specific pathway (Ebbeck & Waniganyake, 2003; Rodd, 2005). These findings also resonate with those obtained in the study by Nupponen (2006b) noting that early childhood leaders should adapt and lead their centers using their own skills and quite often with no formal training in early childhood leadership.

The similarities noted above imply that the scarcity of early childhood leadership training is a challenge that professionals around the world face in this field. While there are promising signals of rising interest in the West to ameliorate this situation, there is one clear revelation. The early childhood education field should offer leadership programs that embodies the required knowledge and ‘in field’ application of best and current practices in order to professionalize the field as well as to encourage the formalization of early childhood leadership position as a viable career path that potential incumbents may seek.

Interestingly, participants’ responses indicated that in the absence of formal preparation programs, a wide array of important competencies had to be learned on the job through trial and error. These competencies included: communication skills to effectively interact with parents- specifically when addressing sensitive issues concerning their children; counseling skills - such as to sufficiently support parents and teachers who share personal issues with the principal; ability to identify students’ special needs and provide the support needed to parents and teachers to deal with a wide array of learning difficulties; managing the budget; recruiting teachers; ensuring the required EC standards of safety and maintenance of the facilities; developing and supervising continuous professional development for teachers to build their specialized capacity to teach early childhood; as well as strategic planning for school improvement.

Most of the participants mentioned that all of these competencies are necessary to maintain a high-quality program that offers children an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.

While there is an increasing interest to improve the level of early childhood education in the Arab states, there is still a lack of leadership training that is acutely manifested in the MENA region.

These findings suggest there is a need to rethink the existing conceptions of what is needed to become an effective early childhood leader. The fact that the participants happen upon the position of early childhood leader rather than make it a purposeful pursuit, raises serious concerns regarding their motivation as well as other aspiring childhood leaders' motivation, to improve the standards and thus professionalism of this role. Furthermore, there is concern regarding how early childhood leadership is perceived by parents and the community especially as early childhood leaders are significant change agents within the early childhood learning community. Consequently, there is a need to create a clear professional pathway for potential early childhood leaders whereby they participate in rigorous education and training for this specific role.

A recent research study on K-12 principal preparation programs reflected a major improvement in the scope and approaches of leadership preparation programs. These programs have been found to include not only theoretical and practical based knowledge, but also offer mentoring and coaching services to meet the on the job demands (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015; Watterston, 2015; Win et al., 2016). It would also be helpful to offer aspiring early childhood leaders practical and on the job mentoring support. Some of the participants in this study mentioned the presence of a

mentor or previous supervisor whom they learned from at an informal level. Hence, intentionally providing leadership preparation and mentorship training programs will empower early childhood leaders and enhance their professionalism in this field.

The Role of the Early Childhood Leaders

The participants in this study view their roles and responsibilities as early childhood leaders as encompassing instructional leadership, business management, and human resource management. As instructional leaders, the participants viewed their role as one where they are: responsible for developing the curriculum; observing and training the teachers; identifying special needs students; guiding parents and teachers; overseeing the assessment process and editing report cards. In addition, they emphasized the importance of reaching out to families and communicating with parents regarding curriculum matters as well as children's progress and behavior issues. In their managerial role, they perceived their roles as one that included ordering resources, managing the budget, monitoring staff attendance, and ensuring safety standards. Their human resource role included, staff recruitment and induction, staff development and motivation, and writing staff performance appraisals. Few of the participants saw their role to include being 'change agents' whereby they would advocate for the children and the teachers in their program to provide quality care and education, as well as change the mindset of parents, the school board, and the community regarding early childhood matters, and develop school improvement plans as the basis to allocate their budget.

The literature review supports the research findings as it also concludes that the early childhood leaders' role is multi-faceted requiring a broad range of responsibilities covering both instructional leadership as well as managerial responsibilities. Research on the role of the early childhood leader identified the responsibilities as: curriculum and program design

and implementation (Hujala, 2004; Lower & Cassidy, 2007) and maintaining relationships with parents and families (Hujala, 2004). Respondents identified same roles- curriculum development and reaching out to and communicating with families. Supporting and nurturing the teaching staff was another role identified by both the respondents and the research (Hujala, 2004; Lower & Cassidy, 2007). With regards to the human resource dimension, Nuppopen (2006) and Whitebook et al. (2012) and the participants' views matched in the sense that leaders' also acted as teacher recruiters. Finally, fiscal health and management of the program (Nuppopen, 2006; Whitebook et al., 2012; Wise & Wright, 2012) are what the participants described as safety, maintenance, and budgeting. Only one of the participants, who is an owner of a preschool, mentioned the importance of understanding the policies and legislation. Yet, the research pointed at the knowledge of related public policy (Hujala, 2004), as one of the key responsibilities of the EC leaders' managerial role whereby they oversee the implementation of the licensing requirements. Licensing regulates indoor and outdoor facilities, health and safety requirements, nutritional guidelines, and personnel qualifications.

Despite the similarities in the dimensions and the overlap of some responsibilities between the EC leader role that emerged from this study and that were also documented in the literature, one set of responsibilities and its corresponding dimension were barely apparent in the results. Namely, only one of the early childhood leaders viewed being a change agent as part of their role. Meanwhile, Rodd (2012) claims that early childhood leaders need to be considered change agents who are expected to guarantee the effectiveness of early childhood education and inspire vision and commitment.

When comparing the role of the early childhood leaders with that of the K-12 principals we also find great similarities and few differences. The similarities are

apparent in the aspects of the role whereas they are responsible for staff recruitment and professional development, ensuring effective discipline procedure is in place at school, strategic planning and financial managing, as well as the role of an instructional leader (Colvin, 2007; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Portin, 2004). Though the domains might look the same, the role responsibilities of the early childhood leader bear unique characteristics. The requirement for staff development is more rigorous where teachers need to be trained to be teachers and not just receive professional development for the purposes of enhancing their already acquired skills or learning new ones. Furthermore, the early childhood leaders are not just responsible designing the curriculum, but also ensuring that the curriculum adheres to developmentally appropriate practices (Lower & Cassidy, 2007). Research also claimed that the early childhood leaders are also involved in the teaching process as their role involves some elements of teaching (Hujala, 2004). In the research findings, two of the participants were actually working as full-time homeroom teachers in addition to their role as program directors. There is also a discrepancy in the role of the early childhood director and that of the K-12 principal in the parental communication and family relation.

Moreover, in an early childhood setting, the EC leader needs to be more heavily engaged in setting and implementing discipline policies, as these tasks are the core of the instructional program and are implemented through behavior management strategies. Research has also shown that early childhood parents are more inclined to become highly involved with the program administrator as they like to feel that their opinions and ideas are valued (Whitebook et al., 2012; Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013). Subsequently, respondents viewed the essence of their role and responsibility as

involving substantial effort to maintain quality relationships with parents through regular communication about their child's experiences and academic progress.

The findings identified key differences in leadership practices in early childhood and K-12. There is a range of job functions of EC leaders which are varied and complex including detailed training services for the teachers, open communication and guidance for the parents, and intensive involvement in students' behavior management and guidance. As a result, a specialized early childhood education administration program is needed to provide the EC administrators with the necessary knowledge required to fulfill the role

The Necessary Skills and Knowledge Needed to Fulfill their Roles

The majority of the participants believed that the necessary skills required are managerial skills, communication skills, knowledge of early childhood curriculum and early childhood development, and teacher training skills.

Some of these skills are similar to those mentioned by international researchers who also found that the skills needed are: managerial and leadership skills; effective communication skills with parents and staff; knowledge of child development; knowledge of early childhood curriculum in all its aspects; keeping abreast of recent developments in the field; participating in specific training topics or educational trends while on the job; as well as instructional leadership skills including being teacher trainers, mentors and coaches (Bloom, 1998; Reckmeyer, 1990; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). There is an overall agreement by scholars on the importance of instructional leadership in creating an effective teaching and learning environment (Hallinger & Walker, 2014; Pustejovsky, Spillane, Heaton, & Lewis, 2009).

However, in the context of Arab early childhood leaders, participants highlighted the need for EC leaders to possess the skills to be teacher trainers in order to equip teachers with the basic skills of early childhood educators such as, implementing developmentally appropriate practices, knowledge of child development theories, practicing effective behavior and classroom management strategies, planning curriculum, and implementing best teaching practices. This need was not a surprising revelation, since most of the teachers do not necessarily have early childhood teaching qualifications due to the scarcity of the early childhood education programs in the region and the lack of policies that requires the hiring of early childhood professionals (UNESCO, 2010). Under these organizational constraints, early childhood leaders are left with no choice but to act as instructional leaders through training and educating the teachers until they gain the basic knowledge and necessary skills to run a classroom on their own.

In addition to the above-mentioned skills, in an early childhood setting research also discussed the importance of cultural sensitivity so as to cater for the diverse needs of the children and their families, knowledge of early childhood policies, in addition to knowledge and skills that allow for political manoeuvring to influence policymaking. However, the participants in this study did not mention these skills. In fact, most of the participants are Arabs working in an Arab community where cultural diversity is minimal. As for their awareness about policy, only one of the participants associated skills that allow them to serve as 'change agents' who could influence policy within their role as early childhood leader. Similar results were obtained in studies that examined the role conceptions of K-12 leadership in the Lebanese context. According to these studies, the dominant conceptions of the role of school leaders do not include them having input in the policymaking process nor

being ‘change agents’ who initiate change at the school level (Akkary, 1997; Harb, 2014). As such, it is not surprising to find this general lack of awareness in the Arab region especially that the research on educational reform in the region claims that educators, in general, teachers as well as principals, are limited in their ability to influence change and are not equipped to generate grounded innovations (Karami-Akkary, 2014; El-Amine, 2005).

Moreover, and in light of the extensive role demands of the early childhood educators, and their organizational context, occupants of this role require a more extensive set of skills than their K-12 counterparts. An early childhood leader is expected to know it all in terms of curriculum design, student behavior and special needs, managerial tasks, family relations, and staff development and training as they are the only leaders in their department. However, the common organizational arrangements in most K-12 schools are to have a technical core whose members assist the school leader. Members of the technical core include the assistant principal, an executive secretary, a special needs specialist, a school counselor and a curriculum coordinator. It is true that the number of students and staff in K-12 surpass that of early childhood, nevertheless, managing and leading this educational institution still requires specialized managerial and technical skills and applying them whether on small scale or a bigger one should ensure effectiveness.

The Challenges that Early Childhood Leaders Face

Recruiting qualified teachers and parental influence on curricular decisions, are two issues that early childhood leaders face in the region, these issues require knowledge of teacher training and adult learning to ensure quality teaching for the students; as well as good interpersonal and leadership skills to satisfy the parents without scarifying the quality of the program.

Finding and hiring qualified staff is a challenge that stems from the laws and policies in the MENA region. According to the participants' in this study, the challenge is not just finding and keeping qualified staff but rather in hiring them. The laws and policies of hiring early childhood teachers do not mandate early childhood background qualifications. In Qatar though, there is reform in early childhood education where Qatar's educational goals are aligned with international standards, there is a lack of opportunity for early childhood educators to get the proper education which results in lack of qualified teachers (Al Thani & Romanowski, 2013). In Dubai, the percentage of public schools that hire qualified teachers is higher than that of private ones. There is no sufficient evidence as to which qualifications teachers in private preschools hold. They do have diplomas and higher degrees but not necessarily in early childhood (Karaman, 2011). In Lebanon and Egypt, a study by the UNESCO in 2006 shows that there are no qualifications requirements for early childhood educators. The results came as no surprise that these principals found themselves responsible for educating the teachers that work under their supervision. It is a huge responsibility, which requires knowledge in adult learning and an understanding of the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge.

The second major challenge is the parental influence on curriculum decisions. Most of the participants voiced their concerns on the lack of parental awareness on what is a developmentally appropriate curriculum and what are the developmentally appropriate teaching practices. Parents mostly compare schools to one another, and believe that the earlier their children learn to read and write the better they are prepared for formal schooling. In their research, The Dubai School Inspection Bureau, found that parents keep moving their children from one school to another because they offer

different curricula regardless of whether the move is appropriate for their children or not (Al-Sumaiti, 2012).

What is developmentally appropriate according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) is when children learn at their own pace and according to their own level of maturity and when learning happens through play and hands-on experiences. According to the participants in this study, the parents insist on worksheets and workbooks, where children can demonstrate their writing ability, as concrete evidence of learning.

Many parents view their children's activities, as a waste of time and that there is no learning value to it. While a lot of international research stress on the significance of play on the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development (Blasi et al., 2002), respondents claim that it is still hard for parents to accept it. The curriculum is not just a collection of hands-on activities; it is a complex notion with multiple components. These components include goals, content, and pedagogy. The curriculum is influenced by content standards, research, culture and language, and children's characteristics (NAEYC, 2003). We can see the dilemma, where early childhood leaders' developmentally appropriate research-based curriculum, do not seem to match with the parents' expectations of what an early childhood program should be. What parents want and what is developmentally appropriate are on opposite ends of the continuum.

While there is agreement about the crucial role of parental involvement, the scholarly views of the kind of support parents can contribute are very different than what the participants described. In the UK, most of the research is on the degree of parental involvement and its correlation to student achievement, and in the US it is

about improving the level parental involvement for the sake of students' learning (Williams, Williams, & Ullman, 2002).

Educationally uninformed interferences are exerting unwanted pressure on early childhood educators based on favoring "customers" satisfaction over implementing what is professionally and pedagogically sound. The fact that early childhood centers are not subsidized by the government and that most of these centered are totally dependent on students' fees leaves the early childhood leaders in a vulnerable position that compromises their ability to educate parents and to pursue the curriculum that studies found to be age appropriate for the learners.

A study by Munn (1998) claims that parents do influence school policy when they exercise their freedom to choose the school they like from a consumer's perspective. Just as any department store that does not patronize the customers, schools try not to antagonize the parents, so they wouldn't choose another school if they feel that this one is not up to their expectations. Another study by Freer (2009) on K-12 principals found that the fact that parents are paying customers, they do pressure the leaders to satisfy them otherwise the enrolment status would suffer. However, a study by Ingersoll and Rossi (1995) on who influence the curriculum, found that public school principals do not have influence as it is left to the policymakers and legislators. Principals of private schools, for instance, feel that they are the major decision makers on curricular matters; therefore, they do not feel any outside pressure.

Whether or not parents can influence change, the fact remains that they represent the customer base and the major source of income for the educational program. It is imperative that the early childhood leader nurture and maintain a good relationship with the parents. Research found that building a trusting relationship (Omar, Nazri, Abu, &

Omar, 2009) between the early childhood administrator and parents is a critical component to parental satisfaction, and a strong indicator of enrollment retention (Keiningham, Aksoy, Andreassen, & Estrin, 2006).

In light of the research findings on these two challenges, it seems imperative that these leaders need training in both teacher development and parent communication. The field should expect those developing and training educators to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their duties. Early childhood leaders should have a solid background in child development, the pedagogy for teaching young children, and adult learning. The findings were clear that communication with parents and building trust is important to keep them satisfied. Hence, early childhood leaders need to be trained in effective communication skills and strategies to involve parents in a positive manner while building a trusting relationship with them.

Conclusion

The aim of this research is to gain insight into how early childhood leaders in the region perceived their roles and educational pathway and what challenges they face performing their role. Though studies found that there is a high correlation between the high qualifications of the early childhood leaders and the quality of curriculum, program and, relationships with staff and parents (Sylva et al, 2004), their training is not deemed necessary in the early childhood context, which led to a lack of training programs (Muijs et al, 2004; Rodd, 2005).

The result of this study suggested that those leaders have a comprehensive understanding of what their role entails as well as of the skills they need to acquire to perform it effectively- in the sense that the leadership role aligns with what is accepted as best practice in the international literature. Despite the fact that most did not become

early childhood leaders as a result of pursuing this role as a career path, they all seemed aware that they lacked training and expertise and hence, they tried to compensate for this lack by acquiring a strong pedagogical background by either registering in in-service leadership training courses, early childhood training programs, or graduate studies in educational leadership.

Moreover, the study revealed that despite their lack of preparation and mostly unintended entry into this career path, most of the leaders appear to have the ability to respond to the immediate demands of their context and to prioritize important goals and tasks, which mostly entailed enhancing teachers' qualifications and skill levels. They realized the importance of having skilled teachers, because as research claim, early childhood programs are no longer viewed as providing care and supervision in the absence of the parents but rather as programs that lay the foundation for young children's academic and professional futures (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011). Research has shown that children's development and learning outcomes are positively correlated with teachers having specialized early childhood pre-service and in-service training (Barnett 2004; Burchinal et al., 20025). They recognized the vital role early childhood education plays in the lives and well-being of children for the betterment of society. Moreover, they recognized that the professionalism of early childhood teachers is a requirement for progress in education. Hence, this shift expects greater professionalism of early childhood programs and places responsibility with these leaders, as they are the program administrators. Research also supports this view as the findings suggests that higher quality early childhood programs lead to better outcomes for children and the early childhood leaders are responsible for maintaining a high-quality program (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Brownlee, Nailon, & Tickle, 2010; Hujala, 2004; Jin

2008; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Nuppopen, 2006). Despite the key challenges they are facing, the participants are focused on maintaining a high-quality program through: curriculum design and implementation; supervision; professional development; and resource allocation.

It can also be concluded that the intense learning that these leaders have undergone and continue to undergo on the job provide support for including a large “field experiences” and “job-embedded” components- such as the design of professional development programs. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities that the results highlighted as well as the challenges faced, provide guidance to those in charge of designing preparation programs.

The K-12 principal preparation programs typically offer training on evaluation, supervision and management practices (Houle, 2006). In a comprehensive review of successful school leadership, Leithwood et al. (2006) explained that the ‘core leadership practices’ are: “setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organization; and managing the teaching program” (p. 22–23). Dodson (2009) suggested in the study on effective principal practices and which is recently being implement in Australia and the US where the programs are including mentoring and career support (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015; Watterston, 2015; Win et al., 2016).

K-12 preparation programs can serve as a guide to developing EC leadership preparation programs from a theoretical and practical perspective. However, it has its limitation because EC leaders are facing challenges that are different from the K-12 challenges and obstacles. A balance is required between preparation programs of EC leaders and that of K-12 leaders. EC leaders’ job requires intensive knowledge of the early childhood developmentally appropriate curriculum, a background knowledge in

counseling to help them provide the proper guidance to families, and a background knowledge in special needs as they are required to identify special needs students and guide parents and teachers in the process.

There should be a call for new forms of EC leadership, as EC leaders should be prepared to become ‘change agents’ to transform the field and transition from a bureaucratic top-down leadership to an instructional and transformational leadership model. As mentioned in the literature review, instructional leadership involves managing the teaching and learning environment to improve teacher performance (Hallinger, 2003). Hence, this transition is possible especially in contexts where principals act as dynamic instructional leaders with a laser-like focus on teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Shatzer, 2009; Southworth, 2002).

High-quality early childhood settings are correlated with administrators who focus on the importance of relationships and how this can influence the organizational climate, or how staff perceive their work environment, as well as provide professional development and continuing education opportunities for all staff (Lower & Cassidy, 2007). This could be achieved through the transformational leadership model. As Burns (1978) explained, transformational leadership is concerned with stimulating change in individuals, and thereby stimulates change in social systems. Instead of establishing a vision and then convincing others to follow, the transformational leader shapes the goals with the stakeholders incorporating their perspective and values (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership requires a commitment on the part of the manager to coach and mentor employees instead of taking disciplinary action. This proved to lead to higher employee performance and job satisfaction. (Men & Stacks, 2013; Salk & Schneider, 2009; Wright & Pandey, 2009). In the context of the early childhood program, the administrator must empower their teachers to recognize their own

contribution to the program and take personal responsibility for the learning out-comes of the children enrolled in the program (Brownlee, Nailon, & Tickle, 2010).

In addition, today's early childhood leaders must act as 'change agents' affecting how the early childhood field is perceived. They should be engaged in a multitude of contexts extending beyond the day-to-day work and to possess a vision that facilitates change. Being 'change agents' is an essential leadership competency, which unites two expectations- what the EC leaders need to know and be able to do. (Goffin & Washington, 2007; Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008; Rodd, 1996).

Recommendations for Practice and Suggestions for Further Research

The main implication for practice suggested of this study is the need to professionalize the field of early childhood. Fromberg (2003) and Rodd (2006) both advocated that professionalization is important if we are to move forward in this field. By professionalization, they mean preparation, education, experience, extended training and career path. Professionalization also includes providing the organizational conditions that allow EC leaders to perform their role. This includes providing in-service training as well as giving leaders' autonomy and providing well-established professional standards for accountability. Early childhood education, more than any other field requires licensure, education, and apprenticeships. Goffin and Washington (2007) argue that the early childhood education field is complex and requires leaders who have the ability to manage it with a high level of strategy and skill. Failure to appropriately prepare these leaders, leads to the reliance on others outside the field to assume the leadership role, to set priorities and policy agendas for early childhood education (Goffin, 2013; Goffin & Washington, 2007; Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008). Moreover, there is concern that these professionals, whether inside or outside the

field, might not have the comprehensive training that allows them to understand the developmental and educational needs of children. Also, they would not possess the skills necessary to engage in reforming the field (Muijs et al., 2004).

Recommendation 1

In light of the results of this study, a recommendation for policymakers is to create a predetermined career path for early childhood leadership, which means creating leadership opportunities for early childhood teachers before permitting them to assume this role. These opportunities could include assigning them the role of curriculum director, assistant to the preschool director, or a level leader whereby they would attend all meetings with the early childhood leader. Such ‘mentorship-like’ experiences including necessary training would help aspiring early childhood leaders to become directors or principals of the early childhood department or center.

Recommendation 2

Another recommendation is to create a formal induction program based on mentoring for the early childhood leaders. The research establishes that beginning teachers need support and mentoring during their induction period (Carter & Frances, 2001). The research further suggests that formal mentoring relationships are an effective strategy in the workplace. Universities should place an emphasis on mentoring strategies in their early childhood principal preparation programs. Usually, mentoring would be offered within a leadership development program, however, these programs are not the norm in this region and in the absence of a clear pathway, mentoring should be arranged in different ways. Examples of such programs and pathways include: connecting with the wider community and other known successful leaders in the field in neighboring schools; creating a cohort of early childhood leaders online for guidance

and support; and allowing the novice early childhood leaders to work with more experienced mentors to fill the knowledge gap before assuming their role. Sullivan (2009) addressed the need to grow leaders in the early childhood education field by advocating current leaders to mentor the next generation of leaders.

Recommendation 3

As this study implies, current and future early childhood leaders in this region need rigorous pre-service early childhood leadership development as well as background knowledge in early childhood philosophy and pedagogy. Policymakers should recognize the vital role early childhood education plays in the lives of children and the well-being of the society and that the professionalism of early childhood leaders is a requirement for the progress in education. Hence, they should mandate that early childhood leaders pursue postgraduate degrees and complete focused training in early childhood leadership competencies to ensure the quality of early childhood programs. Moreover, policy should also require aspiring early childhood leaders to complete an internship program under the guidance of other early childhood directors and administrators before assuming their role.

To achieve the above goals, leadership training should go beyond providing managerial skills to also include teachings on core leadership competencies. These competencies are, relational, pedagogical and managerial. The managerial skills include organizational administration, fiscal management, personnel management, health and safety, family communication and relations. They need to learn organizational administration, as directors are role models who set the tone of the program and build a learning community based on best practices. The fiscal management is needed to conduct financial matters such as budgeting and cash flow management. As they are

responsible for hiring qualified teachers they need to learn about personnel management to hire, supervise and evaluate teachers. Health and safety are major requirements of any early childhood facility. The director's job is to ensure that policies and practices for health and safety are in place and effectively implemented.

Family relations is needed as the research findings indicate that families do interfere in the curriculum and teaching practices and the administrators need to communicate with families about the developmentally appropriate practices adopted at this level. As for leadership skills, early childhood leaders need training in instructional and transformational leadership. Many international scholars recommend strengthening these skills in the K-12 setting (Hallinger, 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Shatzer, 2009; Southworth, 2002). They argued that the key functions of effective leadership include: managing the coordination of program, monitoring implementation and supporting teachers to develop professionally.

Moreover, preparation programs should build their leadership capacity and prepare them to be pro-active and skillful leaders ready to be 'change agents' who can affect policy making (Lambert, 2003). The capacity building should include skills such as, critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal, decision-making, creative planning and engaging in reflective dialogue (Bridges & Hallinger, 1995).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The limitation of this study is that it focused on the experiences of only ten early childhood directors. The interpretations of these findings are particular to the understanding of these directors and there is a limitation in generalizing it to all directors. However, the fact that all the participants were women, which is the norm in the field of early childhood, and that they were from different countries in the Arab

region increases the representativeness of their experiences. The results of the study can hence constitute plausible propositions to be examined on a larger scale to achieve generalization of the findings.

Another limitation lies in the fact that the researcher was included as one of the informants and her interpretation could be biased. During the interviews, when asking about the challenges they faced, the researcher probed some of the participants into a specific direction when they asked for further guidance and clarification.

Moreover, only the viewpoint of these directors was considered, the study did not include staff or families. Hence, future research can be conducted to better understand the extent of the role of early childhood leaders in the MENA region.

The research could also identify and inform on: the type of learning and support early childhood leaders in the region might need; potential issues of concern that need to be addressed- such as teacher qualification requirements and parental influences over the curriculum; the roles and responsibilities that these leaders bear; and effective leadership preparation programs and career pathways in early childhood education. This study used a single method of data collection; additional research that takes many forms, both quantitative and qualitative is required to further understand more about what early childhood leaders and managers experience regarding current training and all the issues that surround effective leadership and management.

APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR EARLY
CHILDHOOD PRINCIPAL/DIRECTOR

Opening statement: There are many ways that we can think about leadership and leadership within the early childhood education field. I am interested in learning about the leaders' individual experiences and how they have come to their current roles. I am also interested in learning more about what current leaders think is required for to be a leader in this field and your reflection on the state of leadership in the field today. This research will help me gain further insights into what are the necessary skills and knowledge background that an early childhood leader need to fulfill this job.

Questions

Research Question 1: What formal and informal professional experiences have early childhood leaders had that have contributed to:

- a. Gaining access to the position?
- b. Enhancing their professional learning and preparing them to perform their role?

Probing questions:

1. Please tell me about your current position.
2. How long have been in this position.
3. What educational and/or work experience led to your current position? What is the path you took to get to this position?

4. Have you participated in a formal education or training program in which you received mentoring as an early childhood leader?
5. Did you feel adequately prepared when you started as an early childhood leader?
 - a. Are there supports or areas of learning that you wish you had?
 - b. What are your professional development needs?

Research Question 2: What do early childhood leaders perceive as necessary skills and knowledge that leaders need to acquire to fulfill this role?

Probing questions:

1. Tell me about your vision of leadership in early care and education?
2. How well does your vision of leadership match with what you see in the field today?
3. When you think of your own development as an early childhood leader, what do you think has been most helpful or had the biggest impact on you becoming a successful leader?
4. What do you think are the necessary skills that you have acquired throughout your years of experience that helped you be a successful leader?
5. How do you think early childhood leaders can develop their skills?
6. How do you develop and maintain interpersonal relationship/communication with the staff and the families?

Research Question 3: What is the nature of the role of the early childhood administrators in the MENA region from the perspective of the role occupants?

Probing questions:

1. What is your role as an early childhood leader?

- a. In terms of teacher development and motivation
 - b. In terms of parent communication
 - c. In terms of day to day tasks required to run an early childhood program.
2. What are the expectations or job description?

Research Question 4: What are the challenges that the early childhood leaders in the MENA region face?

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