



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A Comprehensive Quality Approach to Training Early Childhood Principals in Palestine

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 25, 2024 Accepted: Dec 16, 2024	This present study aims to identify the training needs of kindergarten principals and supervisors in Ramallah Governorate and East Jerusalem, Palestine, using the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach. The study addresses the growing importance of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector in Palestine and the need for enhanced leadership skills among ECE principals and supervisors. The study uses a qualitative research approach and employs semi-structured interviews with principals (10) and supervisors (7) to collect data on their training needs. The study also examines potential differences based on qualifications, experience, and previous training. Findings revealed that there are critical training needs in emotional intelligence, educational management, and stakeholder communication, with significant gaps in current programs' adaptation to the Palestinian context. Recent political events intensified challenges in retaining staff and managing resources. The study recommends developing a comprehensive TQM framework that considers local infrastructure limitations and creates monitoring systems and quality standards specific to Palestinian kindergartens.
<b>Keywords</b> Early childhood education Principals and Supervisors Total Quality Management ECE Palestine	
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## INTRODUCTION

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2019), 148.253 children aged 3 and 7 years attend ECE centres regularly. These children go to ECE to be prepared for enrollment in the first grade. The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education ([MOEHE], 2017) published a report indicating that the number of ECE centers has increased in the past ten years, even though kindergarten education is not compulsory for two years (MOEHE, 2017). However, law 8, published in 2017, states that a one-year education at the kindergarten is mandatory. Despite the large number of children attending and the interest in ECE, the sector suffers from shortages in principles and ECE teachers.

Furthermore, there are no programs to prepare teachers and principals, and there are no long-term professional development strategies for educators. In this context, Jaradat (2014) revealed that kindergarten principals need extensive training courses regarding cognitive and performance competencies. Similarly, Nabhan (2009) noted that kindergarten principals lack the required skills for planning, evaluating, and implementing the lessons. Nabhan recommended offering these principles training courses to address these issues effectively. Further, Shaladan (2019) found that kindergarten principals do not have the necessary skills to write down the requested plans for their kindergartens, and they need training courses that can equip them with what they need. Shaladan recommended offering kindergarten principals training courses to give them the opportunity to develop their plans to enhance kindergarten learning outcomes.

Adwan et al. (2023) demonstrated that the development of ECE is growing in Palestine, and there is a need to improve ECE principals' and supervisors' skills to ensure that these centres can offer a high-quality education for their children. In this respect, the MOEHE highlighted the significance of ECE's principals and supervisors in the Palestinian Strategic Sector Plan 2017– 2022 (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2017). The ministry also stated the needs, aims, difficulties, and solutions needed to improve the ECE in Palestine. Among these needs, there was a focus on the training programs that address the personal skills of the ECE principals and supervisors, such as leadership and accountability ([MOEHE], 2017).

Moreover, the Palestinian MOEHE specified that ECE principals and supervisors must master tasks and skills to ensure the effectiveness of their performance. Thus, the programs designed for principals and supervisors must ensure that those principals need them. The MOEHE always seeks improvement, and there is a need to train ECE directors with advanced skills for the quality of children's learning, growth, and well-being. This can be done by developing special training programs that ECE principals and supervisors need and building policies for additional knowledge to develop ECE leadership skills (Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2018).

### **Teacher's Professional Development (TDP) Programs Existing in Palestine**

The World Bank KG Diploma Program is a comprehensive ECE initiative that enhances teaching practices in Palestinian kindergartens. It is developed through a partnership between the MOEHE, the University of Delaware, and six Palestinian Universities (Adwan et al., 2023). This program aligns with the Palestinian Framework for Early Childhood (PFEC) teacher standards ("Palestinian Kindergarten Curriculum Framework," 2018). It introduces local teachers to child-centred learning approaches, play-based learning (PBL), social-emotional learning (SEL), and improved literacy and numeracy instruction. The program consists of five modules: Child-Centered Education, Learning Through Play, Social Emotional Learning, Literacy in the Early Years, and Numeracy in the Early Years. This training program fills two key gaps; it introduces backward design and social-emotional learning (SEL) teaching methods. The program is designed to help Palestinian early childhood education teachers update their teaching approaches.

The Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) TPD Program offers a wide-ranging approach to ECE teaching and thematic learning. The non-profit ECRC administers it and aims to enhance literacy and numeracy skills, improve drama and art instruction, develop physical education and movement skills, integrate science and nature into ECE, and enhance classroom environments. The training is structured into seven comprehensive modules: Literacy, Numeracy, Drama, Art, Physical Education/Movement, Science and Nature, and Classroom Environment. One of the main strengths of this program is its adaptive design. ECRC collaborates annually with the Palestinian ECE unit of the Ministry of Education to assess and address teachers' specific needs. This collaborative approach ensures that the training remains relevant and responsive to the evolving requirements of ECE educators in Palestine ("National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and Intervention," 2022).

The MOEHE partnered with the University of Delaware and six Palestinian Universities to conduct a study on the needs of Palestinian KG teachers and then design and execute a teacher training program accordingly. Upon completion of the training, teachers received a professional diploma certificate recognized by the MOEHE called "World Bank KG." Approximately 1,140 kindergarten teachers were trained using the World Bank's TPD program in its two years of operation, making it one of Palestine's most widely used programs.

Based on the above review and as a result of rapid developments in the field of ECE in Palestine, the swift development of theories and teaching methods in kindergartens requires kindergarten principals and supervisors to stay updated with these developments and apply them in their work.

Furthermore, the multifaceted responsibilities of kindergarten principals and supervisors, such as managing kindergarten affairs, supervising teachers, and communicating with parents, necessitate staying abreast of these developments to enhance their capabilities in high-quality educational and leadership tasks.

Through experiences in the field of education, the author observed the need for more organized training programs that meet the actual needs of kindergarten principals and supervisors and contribute to developing their skills. Additionally, there is a clear disparity in the experiences of kindergarten directors. Accordingly, there is a need to design training programs tailored to the needs of principals and supervisors. To ensure the effectiveness of the training programs, there is also the need to identify the training themes and goals of kindergarten directors before implementing any training program with them. A recent study by Bader and Baker (2023) was conducted on newly kindergarten-employed teachers to understand their training needs from the directors' perspectives. The study recommended reviewing the training programs for kindergarten-employed teachers to ensure they are in line with the training needs. The study also suggested assessing these training needs to ensure the continuous updating of the training fields in Palestine. Building on this, evaluating the training needs of kindergarten-employed teachers would reflect the efficacy of kindergarten management in general in the Palestinian context. Thus, it is clear that there is a weakness and deficiency in identifying the training needs of kindergarten principals and supervisors in Ramallah Governorate and East Jerusalem (Adwan et al., 2023; Bader and Baker, 2023; Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2018, 2017).

The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of kindergarten principals and supervisors on their training needs?
2. What are their views on training provided in light of the TQM approach?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Total Quality Management (TQM) is an extensive approach to reach excellence in education. TQM is founded on many principles, such as continuous improvement, leadership, inspecting, organizing, and controlling all areas of the organization (Helmold, 2023). TQM aims to integrate all organizational functions and focuses on meeting the needs of educators and stakeholders. The purpose of using TQM in educational contexts is to create a relationship between different aspects of the organization, including mission and vision, administrative leadership, environmental factors, human relations, and feedback mechanisms. Also, TQM ensures that educational services need to meet or exceed expectations (Oakland et al., 2020). In addition, the TQM helps educational institutions enhance their quality by taking regular feedback from students, faculty, and staff to determine teaching methods and curriculum changes. With this in mind, its main philosophy shows the importance of self-evaluation and ongoing processes to ensure continuous improvement and excellence in all areas of educational management (Hoque, 2017). The TQM differs from other approaches as it addresses all components of the educational institution and its goal to improve the quality of education and support services.

The philosophy of TQM is that an institution serves its students by improving the quality of education at all levels, from admissions to alumni relations, by redesigning work processes across the organization. All employees in the TQM setting are aiming at quality that benefits student learning outcomes and student satisfaction (Borges Notarjacomio et al., 2022; Hoque et al., 2017). Furthermore, the literature review shows that the TQM approach can effectively help organizations perform their tasks efficiently and effectively. For instance, Mittala et al. (2023) found that organizations that used the TQM approach improved their overall performance. Similarly, another study by Jaca and Psomas (2015) on Spanish organizations that used the TQM approach led them to

have better performance. By the same token, Bouranta et al. (2019) found that some key parts of TQM, like focusing on customers and always trying to get better, are important in different countries and continents. Earlier work by Anil and Satish (2017) discovered that using the TQM approach improves satisfaction among clients. According to the preceding, these studies from the last few years show that using TQM the right way can help improve workplace performance and make it more successful in accomplishing tasks.

The kindergarten stage, known as preschool, is the phase in which a child begins their journey of learning and acquiring skills and information that help shape their mind. Wilder and Lillvist (2018) demonstrated that this stage is considered a transitional stage that takes the child from a phase where they learn natural life skills, such as eating, drinking, walking, and talking. In addition, the kindergarten stage represents an important gateway in a child's life, as it is a transitional phase between the home and formal school environments. Likhari et al. (2022) added that this stage is important in a child's life due to its effects on their growth and development at social, cognitive, and emotional levels. It also develops children's skills and abilities at an early age.

Kindergarten is considered one of the important entry points for developing a child's personality; its programs work to guide the child in the right direction. Attention to the kindergarten stage is not a luxury but rather an absolute necessity to ensure the proper growth and development of the child. Therefore, parents, society, and governments must work together to provide a rich educational environment that meets the needs of children at this important stage of their lives (Child Development and Early Learning, 2015; Buck, 2020).

In this respect, Ford et al. (2021) and Kjellström et al. (2020) concluded that the leadership role is subject to change and development as a result of development in education. Thus, this necessitates more training for those occupying this leadership position. This training should be based on leadership principles and concepts, such as refining the competence of school principals and acquiring new tools to help them make correct and effective decisions. Sayma et al. (2021) demonstrated that there is a need to develop the quality of the ECE field in Palestine. The study also noted that it is necessary to identify principals' and supervisors' training needs before conducting any training programs to ensure the effectiveness of training courses and programs provided to them.

Kindergarten directors are also considered a fundamental pillar in ensuring the quality of the educational process within these institutions. There is a need to develop their capabilities and skills through organized training programs that meet their needs and improve their performance. They provide children with a safe and active learning environment at an early age. Therefore, in-service training ensures they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties effectively. Moreover, kindergarten directors need strong leadership skills to lead a team of teachers and manage kindergarten affairs (Taylor & Boyer, 2019; Parker et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2023)

In-service training helps develop these skills through workshops and specialized training programs (Chaghari et al., 2017). However, it is necessary to identify training needs before implementing these training programs, as this is a fundamental and essential step before designing any training course (Rowe et al. 2021). This ensures that the training courses achieve their objectives and that their content is effective. Additionally, when trainees feel that the content of the training courses aligns with their needs, their satisfaction with the entire training experience increases. Furthermore, identifying training needs helps prioritize training and better allocate available resources (Whitehead, 2022). A study published by Abou-Dagga et al. (2007) explored the quality of the ECE in Gaza. The study revealed that there is an urgent need to identify the actual needs of ECE principals due to their important role in ensuring the quality of ECE. Other work highlighted that directors need to be engaged in human and administrative roles to ensure that ECE quality is reasonable (Douglass, 2019; Modise, 2019; Strehmel et al., 2019).

Recent work completed by Nipriansyah and Intamano (2022) aimed to obtain an overview of the duties and responsibilities of educational management for school principals towards the quality of education in early childhood. The researchers used a descriptive-analytical approach to complete their study. They collected the data through scientific writings related to the research topic. The results show that the functions of early childhood school principals are decision-making, organizing, staffing, planning, supervising, communicating, and directing. The principal's role in improving education quality is as a teacher, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. The study concludes that the school principal's role in improving education quality is essential and can affect the success or failure of education quality.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Abuhamda et al. (2021) stated, "Quantitative and qualitative methods are the engine behind evidence-based outcomes (P. 71)." Building on this, this study adopts a qualitative research design because it examines phenomena in their natural context (Korstjens & Moser, 2017) and focuses on gathering information from individuals directly associated with the phenomenon, followed by analysis and interpretation. Qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions and attitudes when answering research questions (Busetto et al., 2020).

### **Sample selection**

A total number of 10 Kindergarten principals and 5 kindergarten supervisors were selected to participate in this study. Those principals participated in the Kindergarten Diploma with the MOEHE Ministry of Education within the World Bank-funded Kindergarten TPD. Those principals also participated in kindergarten teacher training programs with the ECRC during the last three years. These TPD programs were selected for review due to their recent and frequent use by local ECE centers, as well as their reputation among Palestinian ECE experts for being high-quality courses. These programs were conducted in collaboration with MOHE. Additionally, the World Bank KG TDP has recently been officially recognized as the MOE's training program (Adwan et al., 2023).

### **Research Tools**

To achieve study objectives, a semi-structured interview was developed as the main qualitative tool. The researcher also used document and record analysis evaluation reports from MOEHE, content analysis of training programs, training materials and manuals, and review of quality standards for kindergartens. Five interview questions were prepared based on educational literature about early childhood training. Participant responses were obtained through recorded interviews. The Thematic Approach was used for qualitative data analysis, providing deeper understanding of collected data (Gray, 2014). Data was organized after initial coding under specific themes, then reviewed to find common links ensuring proper naming and research question answers.

### **Tool Validity**

Tool validity was verified by presenting interview guide to educational administration specialists. They evaluated questions' linguistic formulation and relevance. Questions were modified based on reviewers' recommendations.

### **Tool Reliability**

The reliability of tool was verified through initial interviews with two kindergarten directors over two weeks. Then, it was followed by second interviews for verification through data triangulation.

**Research Ethics**

The study followed Birzeit University ethical standards. Participants contacted by phone due to conditions in Palestine. Consent obtained for anonymous interview sharing. Research purpose explained, personal information kept confidential, and interview information transcribed verbatim.

**Procedures**

Study conducted with principals and supervisors at kindergarten level in Ramallah Governorate and East Jerusalem during 2024-2025. It focused on the training needs using TQM approach. The research steps are as follows:

1. Literature review
2. Interview questions development
3. Expert validation of tools
4. Participant identification
5. Interview conduct and recording
6. Data transcription and analysis
7. Findings presentation

Interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated to English. In-person interviews allowed for follow-up questions to clarify points from principals and supervisors. Study conducted with principals and supervisors at kindergarten level in Ramallah Governorate and East Jerusalem during 2024-2025, focusing on training needs using TQM approach.

**Interviews Analysis**

Participants	Interview Questions	codes	Themes
Principal (P), Supervisor (S)	1. Based on your experience as a director/supervisor, what are the most important leadership skills required in early education	Knowledge of child behavior creates appropriate learning environments (P) Leading a kindergarten requires strategic planning (S) Selecting qualified teachers and building effective teams directly impacts educational quality (P) Building partnerships with parents strengthen educational outcomes (P)  (Child development knowledge Learning environment design Strategic planning Team building Parent partnerships)	Leadership Competencies and Training Requirements

		<p>Professional communication)</p> <p>Professional communication with teachers and community organizations supports our educational mission (P)</p> <p>(Child development knowledge, Learning environment design, Strategic planning, Team building, Parent partnerships, Professional communication)</p>	
	<p>2.What specific challenges do you face in implementing quality management practices in your role, and what training could help address these challenges</p>	<p>Parents cannot pay fees after losing jobs in Israel since October 7th (P)</p> <p>Getting quality educational materials is too expensive (P)</p> <p>Finding and keeping good teachers is hard because we cannot pay them well (S)</p> <p>We rent spaces not designed for kindergartens (P)</p> <p>We lack basic facilities because of space and money issues (P)</p> <p>Parents expect more than what we can provide (P)</p>	<p>Contextual and Operational Challenges</p>
	<p>3.Can you describe your experience with previous leadership training programs you participated in? How effective were they in meeting your professional needs?</p>	<p>Experience with previous training programs</p> <p>We learned good basics about running kindergartens (P)</p> <p>Meeting other directors helped us share solutions (P)</p> <p>The training did not match our situation in Palestine (S)</p> <p>The training was too short (P)</p>	<p>TQM Understanding and Implementation</p>

		<p>What we learned in training rooms often does not match what we face (P)</p> <p>They taught general ideas but not specific management skills (P)</p> <p>(Basic knowledge gain, Peer learning, Contextual mismatch, Time limitations, Theory-practice gap, Skill specificity needs)</p>	
	<p>4. How would you describe your understanding and application of TQM principles in your current role as kindergarten director?</p>	<p>Quality management means putting children first (P)</p> <p>We focus on making things better all the time (P)</p> <p>We document how children develop using special forms" (S)</p> <p>"Quality management sounds complex (P)</p> <p>I make sure teachers follow the daily schedule" (P)</p> <p>"We need to learn more about proper quality management" (S).</p> <p>(Child-centered focus, Continuous improvement, Documentation practices, Conceptual confusion, Basic supervision, Knowledge gaps)</p>	<p>TQM Understanding and Implementation</p>
	<p>What specific components or methods would you recommend for an effective TQM-based training program?</p>	<p>recommended components for TQM training</p> <p>The program must start with leadership skills" (P)</p> <p>- Training should teach us how to monitor the quality at the KG. (P)</p> <p>How principals conduct Teacher training is essential (S)</p>	<p>TQM Understanding and Implementation</p>



		<p>We learn better through practice not theoretical (S)</p> <p>Training should happen in stages (P)</p> <p>We need follow-up to make sure we apply things correctly" (P)</p> <p>We need to learn about financial management and KG management (P)</p> <p>- Principals need to learn Professional development and Human resource management (S)</p> <p>How to organize the internal and external KG environment (P)</p> <p>(Leadership development, Quality monitoring skills, Staff development, Practical learning, Staged, implementation, Continuous support)</p>	
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**DISCUSSION**

**Leadership Competencies and Training Requirements**

Directors mentioned the significance of understanding child development. "A leader must understand children's psychological needs and developmental stages," one director stated. Another director added, "Knowledge of child behavior creates appropriate learning environments." Additionally, the directors noted that the second skill should be focused on educational management. "Leading a kindergarten requires strategic planning from curriculum development to resource allocation," a supervisor noted. Another director emphasized, "Selecting qualified teachers and building effective teams directly impacts educational quality." Communication emerged as the third critical skill. "Building partnerships with parents strengthen educational outcomes," one director reported. Another highlighted, "Professional communication with teachers and community organizations supports our educational mission." Directors noted the integration of these skills. "Educational leadership requires combining child development knowledge with management expertise and stakeholder communication," a supervisor explained. This perspective appeared consistently across interviews. One director concluded, "Effective leadership emerges from balancing these three core competencies

Interview results with kindergarten directors and supervisors showed multiple and diverse training needs, which can be classified into three main areas:

**First: Emotional Intelligence and Child Interaction Skills** The need to develop child interaction skills emerged as a top priority, where participants emphasized the importance of understanding children's psychological and educational needs, deep knowledge of developmental stages, and ability to create emotionally safe and supportive environments. This finding aligns with the nature of

kindergarten work, which requires a deep understanding of child development characteristics and needs.

**Second: Educational Management Skills** Results revealed an urgent need for developing administrative skills, particularly in kindergarten planning, human/financial resource management, and educational decision-making related to kindergarten programs and curriculum. This need emerged, especially given the financial and economic challenges facing kindergartens and the difficulty retaining qualified staff.

**Third: Parent and Community Communication Skills** Results highlighted the importance of developing effective communication with parents and the local community, particularly given community challenges regarding parent expectations and limited local support for kindergartens.

Results align with the TQM theoretical framework in Oakland et al. (2020) regarding relationships between institutional aspects and stakeholders. They also match Anil and Satish's (2017) findings on TQM's role in improving beneficiary satisfaction.

Current study results align with Nipriansyah and Intamano (2022), who identified early childhood school directors' roles in decision-making, organization, planning, supervision, communication, and guidance. They also match Jaradat's (2014) findings, which confirm kindergarten directors' need for intensive knowledge and performance competency training.

It can be understood that this theme emerged primarily from principals' and supervisors' perspectives on their training needs. The findings revealed three essential competency area. In the first place, principals emphasized the need for understanding children's psychological needs and developmental stages. As one director stated, "A leader must understand children's psychological needs and developmental stages. Second, participants highlighted the importance of strategic planning and resource management. A supervisor noted, "Leading a kindergarten requires strategic planning from curriculum development to resource allocation." Third, the ability to build relationships with parents and community is important. One director stated, "Professional communication with teachers and community organizations supports our educational mission". The results agree with Ford et al. (2021) and Kjellström et al. (2020) on the importance of leadership-based training and administrative concepts to improve school directors' efficiency and gain new effective decision-making tools.

This theme addresses the educational foundation needs:

**Unified Curriculum Implementation:** Supervisors identified challenges in implementing standardized curricula while maintaining quality.

**Educational Philosophy Development:** Directors needed a deeper understanding of early childhood education principles and developmental theories.

### **The second theme: Contextual and Operational Challenges**

Many of the participants have not received training since COVID-19. Current programs lack comprehensiveness in personality development, crisis management and emergencies. This study shows important differences from other TQM research in kindergarten education. Our findings reveal special challenges in Palestinian kindergartens that affect how quality management works.

Results of the interviews reveal that they experience many challenges. These challenges are mainly financial, human resources, infrastructure, and political. The financial challenges extend beyond budget limitations to fee collection difficulties due to economic conditions. "The current economic situation affects everything. Parents cannot pay fees after losing jobs in Israel since October 7th," one director explained. Another director added, "Getting quality educational materials is too expensive. We need them but cannot afford them."

The interview results revealed that the staff challenges emerged as another major concern. "Finding and keeping good teachers is hard because we cannot pay them well", a supervisor stated. Another director noted that this connected to training needs: "Most of us never received proper management training. We learn through trial and error." The directors compared their situations, showing similar struggles. "Even when we find qualified teachers, they leave for better-paying jobs," one director shared, while another mentioned, "We need specialized training programs, but they are rare and do not cover everything." Infrastructure problems created additional barriers. Several directors described similar issues with buildings. "We rent spaces not designed for kindergartens. This limits our ability to meet quality standards," one explained. Another director pointed out, "We lack basic facilities because of space and money issues. We do not know how to get funding for improvements." Community relations presented another challenge area. Directors expressed matching concerns about parent interactions. "Parents expect more than what we can provide with our resources," one director stated. This aligned with another's experience: "The community does not always value early education. This makes getting support harder." The directors suggested specific training needs. "We need training in fundraising and community engagement," one supervisor explained, while others requested "programs about managing parent relationships and expectations."

Study results indicate TQM implementation in kindergartens faces major challenges. First challenge is need for administratively and technically competent leadership with accumulated kindergarten management experience. Results also show limited authority for kindergarten directors, especially in public sector, restricting their decision-making and development initiatives. Regarding resources, lack of material capabilities emerged as fundamental obstacle to effective TQM implementation. Additionally, professional motivation and job commitment posed challenges, as many directors enter field as alternative career choice rather than genuine professional interest.

Unlike Borges Notarjacomio et al. (2022), who studied universities, we found that kindergartens need different approaches. "Early childhood education has different needs than universities," directors explained. Young children need special teaching methods and care. Our findings also differ from Mittala et al. (2023) and Jaca & Psomas (2015) who said TQM directly improves performance. Palestinian kindergartens face basic problems first. "We cannot improve quality without proper buildings and resources" one director noted. We need to fix basic issues before applying quality systems. Oakland et al. (2020) suggested using the same quality methods everywhere. However, our study shows that Palestinian kindergartens need local solutions. "Standard quality approaches do not work in our situation," supervisors explained. This matches what Sharifian et al. (2021) found about how war affects teachers through trauma and security problems. We also found different results than Taylor & Boyer (2019) about play-based learning. Our directors face community resistance: "Parents and community do not always accept modern teaching methods," one explained. This shows how local culture affects teaching methods.

These findings align with previous research while highlighting unique aspects of the Palestinian context. They support Jaradat's (2014) findings about the need for comprehensive training but reveal additional challenges specific to the current political and economic situation. The results also extend Oakland et al.'s (2020) work on TQM in education by demonstrating the need for contextual adaptation in conflict-affected areas. It can be understood that the main leadership skills center on three main areas: emotional intelligence and child interaction, educational management, and stakeholder communication. This aligns with previous studies on integrated educational leadership in early childhood. Results highlight directors' need to develop skills in human resource management and teacher motivation, consistent with modern transformational leadership trends in early education.

Supervisors agreed that main challenge in implementing quality management practices in kindergartens is lack of consistency in applying unified early education curriculum developed by

Ministry of Education. Despite having unified curriculum, most kindergartens continue using their own curricula, creating challenge in ensuring uniform education quality. Current curricula overly focus on cognitive aspects at expense of comprehensive child personality development, including social and behavioral values. One training need for directors is how to select appropriate curriculum and implement unified curriculum. Supervisors also indicated that lack of experience in crisis management creates difficulties when implementing quality management in kindergartens. This challenge appears when directors need to shift from their current curricula to the Ministry of Education's unified curriculum.

All in all, it can be noted that this theme reflects the unique challenges facing Palestinian kindergartens. The impact of recent political events has intensified economic challenges. As one director explained, "Parents cannot pay fees after losing jobs in Israel since October 7th. Many kindergartens operate in unsuitable facilities. A director noted that we rent spaces not designed for kindergartens, which limits our ability to meet quality standards. Staff retention emerged as a significant issue, with one supervisor stating, "Finding and keeping good teachers is hard because we cannot pay them well. Finally, directors show strong interest in planning but face security-related implementation challenges. Clear weakness in crisis management due to training/experience gaps, with some seeking expert help.

### **The third theme: Understanding and Implementation**

Results show different levels of understanding of quality management and implementation. They have a basic understanding of child-centered focus and continuous improvement needs, but broader understanding of global quality standards and evaluation methods needs development. Participants shared successful individual initiatives, but these require systematic organization and standardization.

Directors shared different understandings of total quality management in kindergartens. Some showed a basic grasp, while others demonstrated deeper knowledge. "Quality management means putting children first in everything we do," one director explained. Another added, "We focus on making things better all the time. That is what quality means to me." Directors described different ways they apply these principles. "We created good ways to talk with parents. We send regular reports about their children's progress," one supervisor shared. This matched another director's approach: "We document how children develop using special forms. This helps us track quality." Several mentioned teacher development: "We encourage teachers to learn new skills. Better teachers mean better education."

However, some directors revealed limited understanding. "Quality management sounds complex. We just try to do our best each day," one director stated. Others showed confusion between quality management and basic supervision: "I make sure teachers follow the daily schedule. That is how we maintain quality," another noted. The responses exposed a knowledge gap. "We need to learn more about proper quality management," one supervisor admitted. This aligned with others' views: "We know it matters, but we need training to do it right." Some directors compared their practices: "Other kindergartens have better quality systems. We want to learn from them." Most directors agreed on wanting to improve. "Understanding quality management would help us serve children better," one director concluded. Another emphasized practical needs: "We need training that shows us exactly how to apply quality management in our kindergartens." Their responses showed interest in learning despite current limitations.

Directors shared specific ideas for effective quality management training. "The program must start with leadership skills. We need to learn strategic planning and how to develop a clear vision," one director explained. Another emphasized operations: "Training should teach us how to monitor quality and handle documents properly." Through kindergarten directors and supervisors'

responses, they confirmed that the directors had not participated in comprehensive TQM-based early childhood training. Directors and supervisors indicated that directors lacked cognitive and educational philosophy development training. Supervisors emphasized need to deepen understanding of early childhood education philosophy, study age-appropriate learning/development theories, and child development principles - physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and curriculum design based on these philosophies and principles. Previous training programs didn't include these skill developments. They stressed importance of community partnership through parent communication strategies and community partnerships, involving parents in curriculum development. Director (N.Y) noted need for specialized educational quality training, emphasizing curriculum design and evaluation methods for selecting appropriate programs.

Many focused on staff development needs. "Teacher training is essential. We must learn how to assess their needs and help them improve," a supervisor stated. This connected to another director's view: "Good training shows us how to evaluate teachers fairly and support their growth." Directors compared different training approaches: "Some programs only give theory. We need practical skills we can use right away." Assessment and improvement emerged as key concerns. "We need tools to evaluate our work properly," one director noted. Others agreed: "Training must show us how to get parent feedback and use it for improvement." Directors emphasized local context: "The training must fit Palestinian kindergartens. Solutions from other places might not work here." Directors suggested practical training methods. "We learn better through practice, not just lectures," one supervisor shared. Another added. Training should happen in stages. We need time to apply what we learn." Many supported ongoing support: "Single workshops do not help. We need follow-up to make sure we apply things correctly." The responses revealed common themes. "Theory and practice must go together," one director summarized. Another concluded, "Training needs to consider our challenges and resources."

The interviews show important findings about training in kindergartens. Directors shared their past training experiences and what they need for the future. Looking at past training, some things worked well. "Sharing experiences with other directors helped us learn," one participant explained. This matches what Chaghari et al. (2017) found about needing special training programs. However, directors noted clear problems. "Training did not match our situation in Palestine," another stated, supporting Rowe et al.'s (2021) research on identifying needs before training. Directors found training too theoretical. "We got lots of theories but few practical solutions," a supervisor noted. This aligns with Hoque (2017), who showed why continuous improvement matters in education. The training also lacked important management skills. This connects to Nipriansyah and Intamano's (2022) research regarding the fact that principals need various management abilities. For future training, directors had specific needs. They want leadership skills that work in Palestinian kindergartens. This supports Oakland et al. (2020) research about connecting different parts of education. They also need help with curriculum and learning spaces, matching Buck's (2020) findings about quality education environments.

Professional growth emerged as important. "We need better ways to develop teachers and evaluate our work," one director explained. This aligns with Douglass's (2019) research about directors needing both teaching and management skills. Directors emphasized practical needs: "Show us real solutions for our challenges," another added, connecting to Sayma et al.'s (2021) findings about improving Palestinian early education.

These results show directors need complete training that fits their context. As Mittala et al. (2023) found, proper TQM training improves how organizations work. The findings point to needing training that considers Palestinian kindergarten realities while covering all quality management areas.

These results show we need special quality management for Palestinian kindergartens that considers limited money and resources, poor infrastructure and facilities, community traditions, and political and economic problems. "We need quality management that understands Palestinian kindergarten challenges," one director said. This means we should create local solutions instead of using standard international methods.

Directors shared mixed experiences with previous leadership training programs. "We learned good basics about running kindergartens," one director said. Another valued the networking: "Meeting other directors helped us share solutions to common problems." Some highlighted practical benefits: "The field visits showed us how successful kindergartens work." However, directors pointed out important limitations. "The training did not match our situation in Palestine. They taught ideas that do not work here," one supervisor explained. Some directors noted that the program is long yet not comprehensive for kindergarten management and teacher supervision skills needed. It lacked topics on director personality development, budgeting skills, parent engagement, communication, community work, developing quality systems, or curriculum selection.

Many agreed about time issues: "The training was too short. We needed more follow-up support," a director stated. Another added, "They taught us about daily lessons but ignored big-picture planning. We need both." Directors compared theory versus real work challenges. "What we learned in training rooms often does not match what we face every day," one director noted. This aligned with another's experience: "They taught general ideas but not specific management skills we need as leaders." The gap between training and practice emerged clearly. "We learned basic teaching skills but not how to lead a kindergarten," one director shared. Others agreed: "Managing budgets dealing with parents and planning programs need different training." Many suggested improvements: "We need longer programs with regular support," one supervisor stated, while another suggested, "Training should include our local challenges and real solutions." The responses showed that directors value training but need programs that match their context. "Good training helps, but it must fit our needs," one director summarized. They emphasized wanting practical skills over theory. "We need training that helps us solve real problems in our kindergartens," another concluded

These results indicate that there is a gap between training content and practical reality. The interviewee noted that networking and experience sharing were positive aspects; however, programs lacked local context relevance and ongoing support.

It can be concluded that the training needs must have contextual relevance. Training must reflect local realities. A supervisor explained, "The training must fit Palestinian kindergartens. Solutions from other places might not work here". Also, the practical application should be considered. One director stated, "We need practical skills we can use right away." Additionally, the participants are calling for continuous support. There is a need for ongoing guidance. "Single workshops do not help. We need follow-up to make sure we apply things correctly".

The findings suggest that effective ECE leadership development in Palestine requires the following:

1. Integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application
2. Consideration of local constraints and challenges
3. Continuous professional support systems
4. Balanced focus on both educational and operational management
5. Cultural sensitivity in quality management implementation

## **SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

The interviews draw comprehensive ideas of kindergarten leadership in Palestine. "Every day is different, but our mission stays the same - giving children the best start in life," one dedicated director shared. Leadership emerged as a complex skill set. Directors described balancing multiple roles. "In

one day, I switch between being a teacher, counsellor, manager, and community leader," a director explained. Another emphasized emotional aspects: "Children need someone who understands their fears and dreams. We create safe spaces where they can grow." The directors showed how they blend care with professional management: "Running a kindergarten needs both heart and mind," one supervisor noted.

The recent events in Palestine after October increased the existing challenges. "October changed everything. Parents lost jobs in Israel. They struggle to pay fees, but we try to keep their children in school," one director shared. Another described resource struggles: "Educational materials get more expensive every day. We need them but cannot afford them." Infrastructure issues add another layer: "Our rented buildings limit what we can do. We need proper spaces designed for children," a supervisor explained.

Quality management revealed interesting contrasts. Some directors showed innovation: "We created our own ways to track children's progress and improve our work," one explained. Others were candid about limitations: "We want to apply quality standards but need guidance." This honesty helped identify training gaps: "Show us practical ways to measure and improve quality in our context," many requested.

Training needs reflect real-world challenges. "We need programs that understand our situation," directors emphasized. They suggested specific improvements: "Training should include crisis management parent engagement and resource planning." Their focus stayed practical: "Theory helps, but we need solutions that work in Palestinian kindergartens," one director stated.

Community relations emerged as crucial. "Parents are our partners in education. We need better ways to work together," a supervisor shared. Another added: "When the community supports us, children benefit more." Directors stressed building these connections: "Good communication with families helps overcome many challenges." Technology and documentation needs appeared consistently. "We need better systems to track progress and manage information," one director explained. Others agreed: "Modern kindergartens use technology. We should, too, but need training first." These findings show dedicated leaders working hard despite difficulties. They maintain hope and commitment: "Children give us strength to keep improving," as one director beautifully expressed. Their experiences suggest both challenges and opportunities in Palestinian early education. "With the right support, we can do much more for our children," a supervisor concluded. The supervisor demonstrated their determination to provide quality education despite obstacles.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals an urgent need for comprehensive training that fits the Palestinian kindergarten context. Economic challenges, limited resources, and the current political situation make this need more pressing. Directors need training that addresses their real daily problems. Results show the importance of connecting administrative, educational, and community aspects. Directors need multiple skills to handle different responsibilities. Managing kindergartens requires balancing child care, staff development, and community relations. Current training programs do not cover all these areas effectively. It is important to ensure continuous monitoring, field support, and continuous workshops for them. Directors need ongoing support to apply what they learn. This helps them handle new challenges as they appear. Also, Palestinian kindergartens need their own quality standards. International standards do not fit local conditions, as seen in the interviews. These standards should consider infrastructure limitations, financial constraints, and community needs. They must balance quality requirements with practical realities. It can be concluded that these findings point to needing special TQM training for Palestinian kindergartens. This training should address local challenges to ensure an increase in the quality of education. These training programs require understanding both early education needs and challenges in the Palestinian context. These

themes indicate that the standard TQM principles remain relevant; however, their application must be significantly adapted to the Palestinian context and to consider both resource limitations and cultural factors. This supports Sayma et al.'s (2021) emphasis on developing context-specific approaches to ECE quality improvement in Palestine. Furthermore, the emergence of these themes suggests a need for a more nuanced approach to ECE leadership development in Palestine, one that balances international quality standards with local realities while providing sustainable support systems for ongoing professional growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Develop a Comprehensive Training Framework:** Design a holistic TQM training program tailored to the Palestinian context, addressing the specific needs of ECE kindergarten principals. This framework should include leadership development, inclusive education strategies, kindergarten management, and practical tools for curriculum management.

**Enhance Recruitment Practices:** Prioritize qualifications and experience when hiring ECE principals, ensuring they possess the necessary expertise in early childhood education, leadership, and holistic child development.

**Strengthen Curriculum Implementation and Capacity Building:** Conduct workshops and training to support principals and teachers in implementing the unified ECE curriculum. Focus on integrating intellectual, social, emotional, and behavioral learning objectives, and provide specialized training for managing and supporting children with special needs and behavioral challenges.

**Improve Assessment and Evaluation Methods:** Train educators and principals on developing comprehensive assessment and measurement tools that cover all aspects of child development, ensuring alignment with the holistic goals of ECE.

**Establish Monitoring and Support Systems:** Develop robust mechanisms for regular field visits, performance evaluations, and ongoing guidance to support kindergarten directors. Include clear evaluation metrics to measure the impact of training programs and improve kindergarten performance.

**Promote Collaboration and Resource Sharing:** Build partnerships with local community organizations and parents to enhance support networks. Create electronic platforms and resource-sharing networks for directors and teachers to exchange experiences, resources, and solutions.

**Integrate Educational Leadership into Training:** Incorporate specialized educational leadership competencies into undergraduate curricula and professional development programs for ECE professionals, emphasizing transformational leadership and evidence-based management practices.

**Develop Context-Specific Quality Management Guidelines:** Create quality management guidelines that reflect the unique Palestinian context, considering infrastructure, economic realities, and cultural factors while maintaining educational standards.

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