

Considerations of the Management of Parental Involvement and the Performance of Kindergarten Organization

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Abstract

Managing parental involvement in early childhood education is a vital component of the relations between parents and educators in the kindergarten system. The way parents feel towards their involvement and towards the system is transmitted to their children and affects them.

When a child grows up in a relaxed, harmonious atmosphere where there is positive communication and partnership between parents and educational figures that the children spend about half of their time with, the child experiences positive experiences that promote, develop and contribute to the process of socialization that the child begins. This paper approaches the parental involvement from a complex perspective, but also different factors that facilitate the children adaptation to the educational environment and society.

Keywords: *management of the educational system, kindergarten, parental involvement, education performances.*

JEL classification: A20, M10, M14.

1. Introduction for the research in the management of kindergarten organizations

The Israeli Education Ministry (2012) emphasizes the importance of the role that educators play "in bridging between the social norms that children acquire and bring with them from home and community, and between the social structure and the norms they build within the educational framework (Mofit Institute, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to get a general picture that reflects the relationship between the organizational culture in kindergartens in the Arab sector based on the perceptions of kindergarten managers and parents of the children, the management of parental involvement in kindergartens in the Arab sector, the difficulties that kindergarten managers face in this area based on the assessment and perceptions of kindergarten managers and how parents of children perceive these dimensions, and how these dimensions affect the level of organizational commitment of kindergarten managers including its three dimensions: objective commitment, continuity and normative commitment.

This study followed two types of research: quantitative research which included passing questionnaires to kindergarten managers and parents of children

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attending kindergartens, and the second part of the study included semi-structured interviews with kindergarten managers and with parents of children attending kindergartens (five interviews in each group).

The research hypotheses that I elaborated were confirmed to a great extent. The discussion will focus on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research questions and will include materials from the relevant research literature. The questions are divided into three main themes: findings which are based on kindergarten managers, findings which are based on parents of young children and finally background variables of kindergarten managers, parents and their children.

2. Kindergarten managers and the management of parental involvement

The first research question was: "How do kindergarten managers perceive the organizational culture in their kindergartens, the parental involvement and the difficulties related to managing parental involvement and their effect on their organizational commitment?"

The research results showed that kindergarten managers indicated that "the more positively the management of the organizational culture is perceived, the higher the management of parental involvement is perceived and the least difficulties in managing parental involvement are perceived. And the higher parental involvement is, the least difficulties in parental involvement are perceived".

At the beginning of the discussion I will refer to the kindergarten management dimension as a basic field in the present study. Today, the leading concept in the Ministry of Education is that early childhood education is an important and unique educational stage that should be perceived as a separate from school. According to this perception the kindergarten teachers will take responsibility for managing their kindergartens which gives them an icon institution and a status of kindergarten managers, which is also expressed in their salaries (Eyal, K., 2012, p 55). In addition, the kindergarten manager's role includes management and administration simultaneously and instruction for preschoolers (Masada Stodni, Izhar Aofltka, 2011).

The "Kindergarten Managers' Association" worked on monitoring kindergartens and creating an ethical code for kindergarten managers. Among other things, the ethical code stated that in addition to the educational work of the kindergarten manager, she is committed to the proper maintenance of her kindergarten, to the budget management, to the health of children to professional training and to making continual contacts with the parents of the children in her kindergarten (Stone, 2002. In: Tal, Bar, 2010).

Studies among school teachers indicated that their attitude to their job is an important component in their work and reflects their professional worldview. This worldview includes an array of concepts, beliefs and images that the teachers hold, and is strongly influenced by the context in which instruction takes place. This

system designs the educational and academic goals that the teachers put for themselves and their attitudes to their work, of which they build useful principles which are required for the realization of the goals. Thus the kindergarten manager's perception system is the basis for her work with children, and affects the nature of the relationships that exist between the declared level and the practical level in her educational work (Tsorn, 2005; in: Masada Stodni, Izhar Aofltka, 2011).

It was also found in the research literature dealing with kindergarten teachers as professionals (Unger, 2003; Eisenberg, 2005; Aushrat, 2001, Ganz - Aloni, 2003; Admati Institute, 2000) that the definition of kindergarten managers' role, derived from the kindergarten framework plan (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport, 1995, CEO report 2000 (7/c), is a broad and comprehensive definition. It does not accurately determine or detail the behaviors required for doing the job, and therefore the kindergarten managers work in ambiguity (Friedman and Gavish, 2003; Byrne 1994). Moreover, there is no distinction between the responsibilities and authority of the kindergarten managers and the responsibilities and authority of other factors involved in the education of preschool children. In addition, the treatment of issues such as curriculum planning, methods of work and kindergarten management change frequently because of frequent changes in the policy of the early childhood education department (in: Masada Stodni, Izhar Aofltka, 2011).

The perception which prevailed until recent decades regarding the management and promotion of education systems was aimed at objectives (MBO) when the main tool for this is informed allocation and direction of educational inputs, which is based on the assumption that it is possible to measure and evaluate achievements and results of the educational process, and that we can and should direct and manage the educational process so that it leads to the achievement of specific goals. According to this approach, we have to set the target, and decide how the performance and success in achieving the goal will be measured (Shlomo Dovrat and others, 2005).

An evaluation study conducted in 2006 by Yitzhaki, R., Naomi Bacon, Shnoor, T., whose purpose was to gather information from the people working in the field regarding the frame of kindergartens in order for the future frame to fulfill the expectations of its recipients especially the expectations and desires of the kindergarten teachers, included supervisors, early childhood coordinators in Pisgah centers and a relatively large population of kindergarten teachers. The difficulties which were most commonly raised were related to the management of the kindergarten in general and to working with parents particularly, to dealing with children with special needs and to dealing with behavior problems. In addition, when referring to the management of the kindergarten, these studies noted that the kindergarten teacher is the kindergarten manager and she is required to be able to face many factors that come to the kindergarten, such as the supervisor and counselor (in: yitzhaki, R., Naomi Bacon, Shnoor, T., 2006).

In interviews that I held with kindergarten managers (five kindergarten teachers) regarding the management of the kindergarten, particularly the issue of

parental involvement in the events taking place in the kindergarten, they referred first of all to the meaning of the word management from the practical aspect in the kindergarten. They reported a very complex work in which they are responsible for everything that happens in the kindergarten, for the children, for the order of the day, for the contact with various factors out of the kindergarten (such as the local authority, the psychologist, the social worker ... construction and implementation of the annual plan), for building the annual plan and applying it, for preparing a "personal file for each child" which will report on the individual work done with the child and other specific things. Despite all the tasks required from the kindergarten managers to perform their role and although they feel that there are difficulties in managing their kindergartens which are often expressed by the ambiguity in the definition of the job, they see that different professionals and even parents perceive their role with low esteem; "sometimes they refer to them as kindergarten managers sometimes they refer to them only as teachers (Interview 1, p.269). Their management is still cumbersome, in many cases they cannot make a decision without consulting the supervisor or the guide (we are talking here about simple situations taking place during a regular day), for example in the case of "parents' claims".

In the same study of Yitzhak, R., Naomi Bacon, Shnoor, T. (2006), the kindergarten managers said that the management skills constitute a component that is gaining a more central position in characterizing the work of kindergarten managers. The ability to manage and to lead a team was frequently mentioned by supervisors and coordinators. The kindergarten managers also defined the issues related to the management of kindergartens as the most difficult issues that they cope with. 62% of the respondents reported these difficulties in their work: budget difficulties, a feeling of loneliness in the system and difficulties in managing a team (ibid).

3. Difficulties related to the management of the kindergarten according to the perceptions of the kindergarten managers

In this study, the researcher found from interviews with kindergarten managers that they are treated as teachers and not as kindergarten managers and this makes them dissatisfied. Officially, they are "kindergarten managers" as defined by the Ministry of Education and by the CEO report but in reality the local authority and the supervisors not really relate to the kindergarten managers as managers; this leads to a feeling of role ambiguity and a feeling of dissatisfaction among the kindergarten managers, which is expressed in their inability to make decisions, to choose programs and to choose activities relevant to the kindergarten children for many reasons including the small size of the building, the lack of resources and the lack of budgets.

One of the tasks that the kindergarten manager must perform is choosing a "parents' committee" following the belief that the success of the educational practice depends largely on the existence of a partnership between the educational

system (the kindergarten) and between the families of the children who are in the same system, and depends on the quality of this system. The "parents' committee" is supposed to represent the parents of the children and sometimes works as an advocate of the educational system during conflicts with the local authorities and the Ministry of Education (for example, in issues concerning maintenance \enrichment). Although this approach reflects the apparent confidence in the ability of parents to be partners in educational decision-making, some claim that in many educational frames, the power remains and is maintained by the educational staff while the parents act as the executives of the decisions made by the educational system and they are not real partners (Gore and Zalmanson – Levy, 2005; in: Tal, Bar, 2010).

When I discussed the subject of "parents' committee" with the kindergarten managers and mentioned that it is one of the things required from them when managing their kindergarten formally, they mentioned that there is a "parents' committee" which is chosen from the first meeting (which includes five to seven members depending on the size of the group). Most of them noted that there is a difficulty in operating the committee continuously during the year; the committee helps in fun days, in trips and in preparations for various activities like a party, holiday events, raising money, etc.; the committee works very little with parents and children together during the year in the educational field.

There were very few situations in which the kindergarten managers emphasized struggles between the "parents' committee" and the local community or the Ministry of Education on things lacking in their children's kindergartens, etc.

I see that this point is also generally associated with effective management ability and leadership of the kindergarten managers. I see that they always try to meet their job's requirements as defined by the Department for Pre-School Education in the Ministry of Education. Research on the features of a leader could not point at a feature or a set of features that characterize the leader. Rodd (2006) argues that features such as empathy, warmth, respect, honesty, communication and cooperation are crucial factors of the leadership effectiveness of the kindergarten teacher. Rod talks about the personal quality of the preschool leader and her leadership as effective in improving the achievements of the organization, in our case the kindergarten.

In addition, perhaps the difficulty arises from the lack of strength to cope with struggles arising from the personal experience of the kindergarten managers who are all with over 10 years of experience, which taught them for many years that struggles do not bring any progress, because the situation is caused by the local authority, the Ministry of Education, the clear criteria and existing laws. There are many other uncontrolled areas that are not included in the work of the kindergarten managers but they also affect their performance, the implementation of their visions and aspirations in the kindergarten with the children, the staff and parents. This leads to a difficulty in motivation and the ability and skill to make decisions.

Parks managers often use in the transmission of information to parents of their meetings if general meeting or meeting individually with each parent and the

parent, and the transfer of information on the gene, the disadvantages, difficulties, etc., without a request for a targeted search for solutions to it.

Usually kindergarten managers use a tool for the transmission of information to parents during the general meeting or during individual meetings with each parent, and they use a tool for transmitting information about the kindergarten, the disadvantages, the difficulties, etc., without making any requests to search for solutions these problems.

Claudi Tal (2004), in her articles "Parents and Kindergarten Managers", said that the commitment to work with the children's parents is a necessary thing in the work of the kindergarten manager inside the kindergarten.

In terms of parental involvement management, I can attribute the difficulty to the lack of professional preparation of kindergarten managers towards the foundations of management through workshops, in-service courses, etc. This was examined in the interviews held with the kindergarten managers, who said that they did not take any courses in the field of management and did not take any courses on how to design parental involvement.

Kindergarten managers have many thoughts and ideas, but the gap between what is available and what is desirable is large, particularly when the budgets allocated to kindergartens do not really fit the ideas and their effective development.

When I discussed the work of the assistant, who is also an integral part of the system and has an important role in helping the kindergarten manager, the kindergarten managers perceived the assistant's work as significant and important which contributes to the quality of work in the kindergarten. They showed empathy towards the assistants and were aware of their need for belonging, professional autonomy and appreciation. Therefore, the kindergarten managers invest in building an interpersonal and supportive relation and they provide help and support to the assistants in carrying out their job despite the professional differences that exist between the kindergarten managers and their assistants.

The kindergarten managers referred to the work of the assistants as essential and so they talked about the fact that programs and laws in kindergartens change frequently; almost every year we see there is something new in the field of early childhood education and they mentioned that "the assistants are usually not educated and do not take part in workshops or seminars related to their work in kindergartens, to their limits and to their obligations to the kindergarten managers, the children, and the local authority. As professionals, they do not participate in training courses or seminars on their work in kindergartens". I could see based on the answers that on this issue there is a problem we should explore in depth in future studies.

To sum up, the work of the kindergarten manager and the kindergarten management requires a lot of strength and a great ability of organization and planning from kindergarten managers; they require them to be able to build interpersonal relations with different factors related to the kindergarten such as the psychologist, the local authority and parents. Therefore, kindergarten managers

need to have effective leadership ability in their work. There is no doubt that the efficiency of the leadership affects the feelings of the kindergarten managers and reduces the ambiguity and dissatisfaction with their functioning in the managerial, educational or pedagogic domains.

4. The parental involvement management

The findings of this study indicate averages of parental involvement which are at the center of the scale; this indicates on moderate parental involvement based on the perceptions of the kindergarten managers with almost no differences between the dimensions (see Table 2: School-Based Involvement; Home-Based Involvement; Home-School Conferencing. P. 259).

From my own experience and work in kindergartens for 19 years and work with children's parents, I see that it is true that parental involvement has importance when working together with kindergarten managers because they are an integral part of the educational, organizational and behavioral practice of their children. However, the implementation dimensions do not really meet the requirements of the kindergarten managers with regard to the special topic of "parental involvement as presented by the program of the Ministry of Education: "Educational Practice in Early Age, 2011). The program offers three sessions with parents and individual meetings with each parent when the purpose of the meeting is related only to the specific family and its child (Ministry of Education-The Program of Educational Practice, 2011).

Various studies have given great importance to the topic of parental involvement in general and specifically in early childhood (Fathi Ihmeideh et al; 2008; McWayne et al.2004; Lavenda, 2009).

Studies show that the better the relationship between kindergarten managers and parents and the closer this relationship is, the greater the parental involvement in the education of children. This has positive effects on the academic achievements, the social adjustment of children and mainly on the normal and healthy development of children. Good relations and close ties reward both the kindergarten managers and the parents, but they constitute a complex challenge for everyone and they need proper preparation of the kindergarten manager and parents in this regard.

Similar findings with regard to the perception of kindergarten of parental involvement in their kindergartens (that it is an intermediate involvement) were found in a report called "assessment of communication between family - early childhood education systems" (kindergarten -3rd grade) in 2011. It was found that in the Arab sector the rate of parents involved in the educational setting in general is low; there is a need to increase the awareness concerning the importance of parental involvement in the educational setting; therefore, it was proposed to run circles of parents already in kindergarten. There is a need to construct a convention between the kindergarten and the parents specifying the rights and obligations of each party. In addition, there is a need to construct a monitoring program checking the implementation of these procedures.

These findings which are new (in 2011) reinforce the perception that kindergarten managers expressed: parental involvement in kindergartens are still lower than expected (Table 2.p. 259).

As a researcher and as a professional in kindergartens for many years, I can see that there is still a gap between reality and ideal situation in involvement management which leads to the kindergarten managers' perception of parental involvement in kindergartens as moderate. I can explain why this happens. First of all, from my experience there are many reasons from different directions.

First of all, if I look at the program of parental involvement presented by the Ministry of Education and the importance given to this issue, I do not see any action measures apart from general meetings in which kindergarten managers transmit information about the kindergarten and the work plan and invite parents to be partners in the process, and individual meetings in which the kindergarten managers refer to the strengths and weaknesses of the children privately. Other reasons that I think can strengthen this finding is the fact that kindergarten managers are not trained how to manage the kindergarten and how to hold a dialogue with parents but they are usually trained in the educational and achievements aspect. The size of children's group also received a positive correlation among the kindergarten managers. This can make it difficult to reach all parents, it can make it difficult for the kindergarten managers to be consistent after each child and his/her progress and difficulties, if there are any.

Certainly, I see the disadvantage of the lack of experts in child development such as a physician, a psychologist and a counselor whose presence at least once every two weeks can help the kindergarten manager and can give a lot of answers to questions or dilemmas that the kindergarten manager (or even the parents) encounters during her work. Combining the professional aspect together with the emotional and mental health aspect is a step that can complete the practice circle in the kindergarten, it can give answers to the problems and cases that children and their parents encounter, and in this way the kindergarten manager will be more available and the child's progress will be more efficient, focused and successful.

The importance of parental involvement has been discussed for many years (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Dockett&Pern 2008; Ihmeideh et al, 2008; McWayne et al., 2004; Lavenda, 2009) and its importance was also positively supported in young children's life because children's development is situated within the context of family, culture and community, rather than in isolation (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). In order to fully understand and respond to children in early childhood settings, educators must be aware of these contexts and facilitate community and family involvement in the setting (Dockett & Pern, 2008).

Parental involvement has become a greater challenge in recent years as the characteristics of families are changing. Now more than ever, mothers constitute a significant portion of the work force; more children are also living in single-parent households (McWayne et al.2004).

Lavenda (2009) offers a way for dealing with this challenge and with the need for proper preparation. Lavenda suggests to work on a relationship of "educational alliance" between kindergarten managers and parents. "Educational alliance" means connections and relationships which provide security and protection and which intensify all the partners. Educational Alliance promotes a dialogue between teachers and parents and builds trust and shared responsibility for educational practice. Soviet education is the responsibility of the participants and gives them insights, tools and mechanisms to design their desired relationship. Challenges of development, design and management of educational alliance relationships are challenging all educational factors for beneficial growth of preschoolers. Involvement in their child's life parents is very important for proper development and achievements arrival (Lavenda, 2009).

Lavenda (2009) offers a way for dealing with this challenge and with the need for proper preparation. It is proposed to work toward a relationship of "educational alliance" between the kindergarten managers and parents. "Educational Alliance" means relations that provide security and protection and that empower their partners. Educational alliance promotes a dialogue between the kindergarten managers and the parents and builds trust and shared responsibility for the educational practice. Educational alliance is under the responsibility of the participants and it gives them insights, tools and mechanisms to design their desired relationship. Challenges of development, design and management of educational alliance relationships are the challenges of all the educational factors whose goal is the optimal growth of the preschoolers. Parental involvement in the children's lives is very important for the proper development and achievements of the children (Lavenda, 2009).

Parental involvement in preschool education is essential for children's success in kindergartens. The evidence for the benefits of home-schooling as a result of parents being involved in their children's learning activities is overwhelming. The growing body of research studies has demonstrated that parents' involvement in their children's learning activities in kindergartens and in home-schooling situations positively affects their children's achievement in kindergarten boosts their academic self-confidence; increases their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and directs them towards mastery goal orientation .facilitates their literacy development and positively influences children's later school competence as their parents' instruction is likely to remain deeply rooted in their memories even after they leave school . .(Ihmeideh et al; 2008).

Wentzel (1999) posits that through ongoing interactions within the family context, parents socialize children in a way that promotes internalization of specific social and educational goals. This early proximal relationship provides children with structure and clear behavioral expectations to promote success in school. By engaging in educational activities with their children at home (such as supporting homework and modeling reading behavior (in: *McWayne et al*; 2004).

Combining business knowledge with educational knowledge empowers the role of the kindergarten manager. Kindergarten managers need professional knowledge about preschool age and need business management knowledge by which they acknowledge the kindergarten as a business and the parent as a client. By this knowledge kindergarten managers leading a business and educational perception in the kindergarten and they are seen as the central, professional and authoritative figures who are valued and unique in the eyes of parents and the staff of the kindergarten.

Such managers know how to lead the kindergarten to success. Professional and educational knowledge will give the kindergarten managers the power and confidence to lead and thus they will be satisfied with their vision, they will set goals, they will know how to market their perceptions in the kindergarten and outside it, will know how to build secure communication with parents, team members and children from clear, confident and emphatic position while setting limits (Michal Harpaz, 2009).

To sum up, I referred above to everything related to the management of the kindergarten and to the kindergarten manager including the difficulties the kindergarten manager's face and how they define the level of parental involvement in their kindergartens. According to the findings mentioned above we can still see that the involvement is still low according to the perception of the kindergarten managers in the Arab sector; the perception of the kindergarten managers of their managerial role is still seen as a complex and blurred; there are many tasks they must apply throughout the year with various factors such as the local authority, the Ministry of Education, parents, professionals such as a psychologist, a supervisor, coordinators, etc.

Another point which received significant attention in this study was "difficulties related to parental involvement". Regarding the difficulties in managing parental involvement which were examined in this study, the findings show that the kindergarten managers perceive difficulties related to parental involvement as low to medium. The average of the kindergarten manager's work (teaching) was the lowest; this shows the difficulties related to the educational work of the kindergarten managers are low. According to the research findings, the kindergarten managers mentioned that the difficulties in their work are primarily at the following points: the curriculum imposed on the kindergarten managers which they need to prepare and perform, difficulties related to the parents' beliefs and difficulties related to the building and equipment (budget), and difficulties related to managing parental involvement.

According to Abu Yunis (2007) there are a number of problems in parental involvement and partnership. The first problem related to parental involvement and partnership is the definition of the term. Despite the separation between the terms it can be said that there is no partnership without involvement and no involvement without partnership (Goldberger, 1988; in: Abu Yunis, 2007).

The second problem is the difficulty to define the partnership boundaries. A border should be the product of an ongoing dialogue between the education

system and parents which is based on guidance and mutual respect. Other problems include resistance of busy parents (busy at work or in their career) and objection from teachers who fear that the cooperation threatens their status or professional authority.

Based on my personal experience I can assume that perhaps this perception of the difficulties related to parental involvement as low to medium is because the kindergarten manager works with parents as formally requested regarding the issue of parental involvement, and when the kindergarten managers succeed at least in holding general meetings and individual meetings with parent alone then they fulfill the specific requirements given at the beginning of the school by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The average for the work of the kindergarten managers (teaching) was the lowest of all and this shows that there are minor problems in this context.

According to the researcher, the experience and training that the kindergarten teachers got during their academics studies prepared them and gave them a sense of control on the educational domain, which is the most important domain today for parents and professionals and for the organizations responsible for organizing the kindergarten.

But on the other hand, there is no doubt that the kindergarten managers referred to the issues that make it difficult for them to work effectively in the kindergarten, such as difficulties related to the learning programs.

Following this and according to the research findings, the kindergarten managers related to the major difficulties in managing parental involvement in three areas: the first was educational programs, difficulties related to parents' beliefs and difficulties related to the buildings, the equipment and the budget.

Conclusions

Dealing with the diversity among the children presents the kindergarten manager with a variety of challenges during their daily work, such as dealing with children with special needs, behavioral problems and different developmental stages of children.

This issue received support in my research when the kindergarten managers related to these points in the interviews that I conducted with them.

According to the kindergarten managers what affects their functioning and makes it difficult for them is "the population of kindergarten which includes two ages, a group of 3-4 years and a group of 4-5; this requires from the kindergarten manager to construct two programs to suit different ages based on the development elements of each group.

One kindergarten manager said "I working with children aged 3-4 and invest continuously in converting the program and activities to suit those children; integrating ages ranging from 3-5 makes it difficult to implement the program in a steady sequence, it is confusing, it makes it difficult for me as a kindergarten manager to implement the pedagogical and learning part because I have to deal

with all ages and "I need to prepare the children who will from the kindergarten from all respects. So, on the one hand, I should promote the children who are in the process of moving to the kindergarten, and I also have to develop capabilities in various areas in children of three years" (Interview, lines 61-65).

These are only few of the challenges that parents, educators and managers of kindergarten have to take into considerations in order to assure the best conditions and results in the educational environment for the children in a pretty dynamic and challenging world.

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