Practices of Participative Leadership in Relation to Professional Competency of Principals at Saudi Kindergartens

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Abstract:- The research aimed to identify the extent of practicing participative leadership for the kindergarten principals from the teachers' prospective, and how principals' practices of participative leadership's pattern contributes in determining the level of their professional competency. Also, this research aimed to identify variances amongst sample responses in accordance to the research variables (qualifications, educational background, and years of experience for principals). The statistical-descriptive approach is used, where a random sample of teachers at public kindergartens in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia were adopted. A survey was sent to (5) teachers in each public kindergarten, which is equivalent to a total of (165) teachers representing (39%) of the population. However, the retrieved number of surveys was (120) teachers. The research gathered information through a survey, which consisted of two parts; the first part covers demographic data, and the second part covers two sections: 1) participative leadership divided into four dimensions (practice, decision-making, characteristics of participative managers, and human relations) which is consisted of (46) items, and 2) professional competency divided into four areas (planning and implementation, guidance, monitoring and evaluation, sustainable professional growth) which consisted of (24) items. The research results were as follow: The level of practicing participative leadership scored high in all dimensions with a mean of (4.19). Similarly, the professional competency level of principals is high in all areas with a mean of (4.24). While, there were significant differences at the level of practicing participative leadership dimensions and professional competency fields in accordance to the research variables, there were also a high correlation between the level of participative leadership and professional competency with a value of (0.923) at a significance of (0.05). The research recommended providing training and development programs in leadership generally and participative leadership particularly for kindergartens' principals, likewise, incorporating participative leadership skills in the principal's annual evaluation form. One of the contributions of the research is the list of professional competency areas (derived from the research tool) for the process of nominating kindergarten principal to raise the applicant' efficiency level. The research highlighted the importance of adopting an educational participative leadership program within the preparation programs for school leaders and teachers' training programs.

Keywords: Leadership, participative leadership, professional competency, principal, Saudi kindergartens.

Introduction

The past century has showed us numerous ways of viewing educational institutions. One prominent model is the traditional approach, which views institution as a hierarchical system in which authority and intelligence are initiated at the top and delivered down through instructions and regulations to the lower levels of the system before being put into practice. According to Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson & Daly (2008), improvements in school effectiveness have been made, but a top-down approach in leadership could prevent progress by avoiding flexibility or meeting staff needs. Another insight on educational leadership, which is also the newer perspective, is to think about school as cooperative, shared and two-way in which the belief is good ideas exist at every level of the institute. These ideas can be established when the school leaders act in ways to motivate subordinates to release their competences (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

Nowadays, in light of the changing actions and development and the emergence of recent leadership patterns that take into account the balance and reconciliation between the concepts of cooperative leadership and collaborating culture, leadership forms a central focus in most institutions representing different activities and fields where they rely on, as a result of increasing in institution' sizes, and the expansion of their activities and roles in the society (Mead, 2011). Accordingly, this requires change and development in the traditional leadership patterns and the rise of new patterns that consider balance and adjustment between the concepts of both shared leadership and cooperative culture. In this context, educational institutions are not exceptional that research evidence (Rayner, 2009) verified that there can be no doubt that successful educational leaders are the most capable of raising the institutions capabilities and contributions. In consideration of that, the school principal as an educational leader has a lot of energetic duties and important roles to accomplish the school's goals in association with his leadership style and skills (Mead & Guernsey, 2010).

The participative leadership is considered a model with positive effects that depends on collaborative work in forming and improving relationships among the individuals. It provides a supportive climate for cooperation between the leader and his staff which lead to vision and goal clarifications and accomplishments through duties and regulations (Sirisookslipa, Ariratanaa, & KeowNgang, 2014). Participative Leadership is a positive, cooperative-based pattern, providing a climate that fosters the relationships between the principal and the staff to achieve community partnership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

A report produced by the National Staff Development Council (2010) indicated that the concept of participative is more comprehensive than the concept of cooperation and collaboration, basically, cooperation involved personal or group activities, while collaboration indicates the activity of an individual in association to his behavior towards another individual, group, or institution. On the other hand, participation refers to practicing association, that is completely different to the concept of participative which refers to practicing more deeper, committed and planned activities among equal parties even if one party is notable than the other, as equivalent participative is identified through communication channels (Alexander & Phillip, 2012).

Also, UNESCO recommended a set of concepts, rules and practices that must direct the educational administration systems and regulations in the 21st century schools, and indicated that the fundamental concept of the system is participative, which is not limited to achieve decentralization and delegation of authority, it is also extended to include local civic organisations, families, students and teachers to participate, support and develop the teaching process as a whole (Hamlin, 2007).

As Sarafidou & Chatziioannidis (2016) referred to two main reasons, which require educational institutions to move towards participative leadership: the need to keep pace with the recent changing trends in the schools' administration structures towards learning organizations, besides the social pressure, accountability and educational modifications that lead to effectiveness of schools through teachers' support to take responsibility and increase their commitments.

Competence is defined by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) as a multipart skill, behavioural pattern or knowledge that appears in the principal behaviour (NAESP, 2005). and is acquired through an objective professional plan that determine qualifications and its training programs, where competency appears in the person's behaviour who joined these programs in a form of capabilities that reflect in a functional manner in his career performance and field job. There are number of studies that performed on the school principals to identify the qualifications that they should have, as (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey 2006) showed that there is a significant correlation between the level of leader's quality and his professional qualifications. Research studies (Gronn, 2000) revealed that there is a correlation between the leading personality of principals and their qualification skills, and that shape their

professional development plan which in turn have unlimited effects on the educational process and the school's achievements and success (NAESP, 2006). It is unquestionable that successful organizations are headed by effective leaders, without overlooking other managerial skills and qualifications cause it will remain essential in all cases and in all organizations (Goddard & Hart, 2007)

This research considers the participative leadership with its concepts and dimensions, and the reflection of the professional competency of the school principals regarding their responsibility in response to the challenges of leading an educational organization.

Statement of problem:

In response to the development of administration units at the ministry of education (MOE) in Saudi Arabia, as stated in the recommendations of the 18th forum of "Educational Leaders", that resulted in the announcement of the Minister of Education decree no. (30324350) dated (7/7/2009), regarding shifting administrative units to decentralizing and modifying the heading of school principal to school leader (MOE, 2009). As Alghamdi & Abduljawad, 2012) declared that the school administration in Saudi Arabia faces several complications; one of these difficulties is lack of collaboration practices by leaders. Also, the researcher during field experiences of pre-service teachers realized that the organizational structure of Saudi kindergartens is usually very narrow and limited due to size and nature of work, thus permitting principal's direct link with teachers and staff in most of teaching activities and daily routine (MOE, 2015). Recent studies (Almehmadi, 2016) have pointed out to slight participative practices by school leaders generally and kindergarten leaders particularly. Also, there is a burden on school leaders in Saudi Arabia since they practice both administrative and practical roles, which calls for the development of leadership models in line with the tasks assigned to them. In regard to kindergarten principals, this dilemma has a high impact on introducing the concept of collaboration to raise the efficiency of the school administration and the leadership styles. These facts raise the need to highlight the

importance of the practicing participative leadership in relation to professional competencies of kindergarten principals.

Research objectives:

The research aimed to identify the extent of practicing participative leadership of kindergarten's principals from teachers' perspectives. In addition, the research described how practices of participative leadership pattern contribute in determining the level of principals' professional competency, and identifies differences in the sample responses in accordance to the research variables (qualifications, educational background, and years of experience of the principals).

Research questions:

The research questions are as follow:

1. What is the degree of participative leadership practices of kindergarten principals from the teachers' prospective?
2. What is the professional competency level of kindergarten principals from the teachers' prospective?

Research hypothesis:

1. There is a correlation between the degrees of participative leadership practices of kindergarten principals and their professional competence level.
2. There is a statistically significant difference at the level of (0.05) between the degree of participative leadership practices of kindergarten principals and their professional competence level in accordance to the research variables (qualification, educational preparation, and years of experience).

Research methodology and sample

The descriptive approach is used, which is based on describing the phenomenon and studying it as on the real world, and to express it qualitatively and quantitatively (Neuman, 2006). The research adopted a random sample of teachers at public kindergartens in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the population of public teachers were (410), the survey was distributed to (5) teachers in each public

kindergarten, which is equivalent to a total of (165) teachers representing (40%) of the population. However, the retrieved number of surveys were (120), which indicates that the research sample consisted of (120) teachers.

In the quantitative phase of the study, the staff sample size (n=120), the majority of whom (92.5%) had university degrees in education and (60,0%) were specialized as early years teachers. The majority of respondents (n=89; 74.2%) had more than 11 years teaching experience, and had been in their current school for more than 6 years (49.1%). 93 teachers (77.5%) reported teaching within their current principal for more than 3 years.

Research tool:

The research gathered information through a survey, which consisted of two parts: demographic information that includes qualifications, years of experience, educational background. The other part is divided into two sections: participative leadership section divided into four dimensions: practice (α =.86), decision-making (α =.89), characteristics of a participative principal (α =.79), and human relations (α =.86) which is consisted of (46) items and professional competency section divided into four areas: planning and implementation (α =.84), guidance(α =.86), monitoring and evaluation (α =.91), and sustainable professional growth (α =.89) which are consisted of (24) items.

Each item within the survey is measured using a five-point Likert-type scale to indicate the participants' ratings in each area of practices using the categories: (5) extraordinary practice; (4) good practice; (3) acceptable practice; (2) some practice and (1) low practice or none.

Data collection:

A questionnaire is a form of survey research which gathers large amounts of data from many respondents in a relatively inexpensive way (Krathwohl, 1998). Respondents choose answers to questions and supply basic personal or demographic data. A rating survey featuring Likert-style responses was used in this research to collect quantitative data. A cross-sectional rather than a longitudinal design was utilized to collect data about current attitudes, opinions, and beliefs. This is the most popular form of survey design used in education. In a cross-sectional survey design, the researcher collects data at a specific point in time. This design has the advantage of measuring current attitudes or practices and also provides information in a short amount of time (Elena, Usaci, Norel & Vlad, 2012).

For validity and reliability tests, the survey was implemented on a sample of 20 teachers at public kindergartens. The surveys were distributed to teachers through regular visits to kindergartens, where the number of responses reached (98). In order to receive the potential responses, the survey was transferred electronically to facilitate access to as many teachers as possible by sending a link to their mobile phones with the help of the administration department of Kindergarten at the ministry of education; the received responses were (33). Two surveys were excluded as their answers were illogical, bringing the total number of paper and electronic surveys to (129).

As for the ethics and the researcher's role, routine ethical procedures were followed to protect the research participants' rights. Before data collection, the researcher informed the teachers about the research purpose, the type and length of the procedures, the nature of their contribution, the confidentiality of the data gathered, and their rights to withdraw from the research anytime. The researcher received both written and verbal consent from all teachers in the research. To ensure anonymity, the researcher assigned numbers for teachers' names, and changed the kindergarten names.

Results and Discussion

In the first section of the survey, teachers were asked to rate the practices of participative leadership of kindergarten principals in the specific dimensions of the identified practices. This answered question (1): What is the degree of participative leadership practices of kindergarten principals from the teachers' prospective? The responses are documented in table 1

Table (1) Dimensions of participative leadership of the kindergarten principals by mean scores and standard deviation

Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Proportional Weight	Degree
Participative leadership practice	4.08	77	3	81.9%	Good
Participative leadership in decision making	4.06	77	4	81.2%	Good
The characteristics of the Participative principal	4.36	90	1	87.2%	Extraordinary
Human Relations	4.34	95	2	86.8%	Extraordinary

Kindergarten teachers believed that the availability of the participative leadership was highest in the dimensions of characteristics of the participative principal and human relations. Results indicated the areas where the decision making and participative leadership practice were slightly lower. The researcher accepted this result due to the qualifications and training received by kindergarten principals.

Studies conducted by (Leeman, 2007) showed that the leadership skills of the school principal increased from 50% to 84% as a result of attending training courses or seminars on leadership. The high level of availability of the participative qualities of the school principal reflected in turn to their ability in the dimension of "human relations", where the results confirmed that they are of extraordinary level as the study of (Shah, 2006) confirmed that human relations came at the highest levels of participative leadership. Rayner and others (2005) revealed that the most common leadership pattern used by kindergarten principals is the participative pattern in order to reduce resistance to change.

The results are somewhat different from (Almunai, 2007) study, where its results disclosed many problems facing the administration in Saudi schools; no spirit of teamwork and low motivation levels, which are attributed to the weak practices of participative leadership by the educational leaders.

In the second section of the survey, teachers were asked to rate the competency level of kindergarten principals in the specific areas of the identified attributes. This answered question (2): What is the professional competency level of kindergarten principals from the teachers' prospective? The responses are documented in tables 2.

Table (2) Areas of Professional Competency of the Kindergarten's Principals by mean scores and standard deviation

Areas	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Proportional Weight	Degree
Planning and Implementation	4.24	78	2	84.8%	Extraordinary
Directing	4.22	88	3	84.4%	Good
Follow-up and assessment	4.10	87	4	82%	Good
Sustainable Professional Growth	4.31	86	1	86.2%	Extraordinary

The results indicate that teachers overall rated the competency level of their principals towards the highest level (extraordinary to good) in all areas.

Kindergarten teachers indicated that they believed professional competency existed in their principals especially in the area of planning and implementation and sustainable professional growth. The researcher attributed this high competency level to the accumulated years of working experiences of principals which indicated that they have achieved their objectives and made their competencies level consistent with their practices. Also, these results are confirmed with the findings of (Babak, 2012) that reported high degree of effectiveness among kindergarten principals in the area of management of their settings.

There were no statistically significant differences between the sample responses in the dimensions of participative leadership and areas of professional competency according to the research variables. The

researcher concludes that the result to the practices of participative leadership and professional competency by the principals are clear in every dimension and relate to all the teachers with their different qualifications and experiences because it is based on the basis of participation among all of them in various areas within the kindergartens.

The results confirmed the high correlation between the degree of participative leadership practices and the level of professional competency where the value of Pearson correlation coefficient was (0.923) with a significance level of (0.01) which is a positive value. Results are documented in table 3.

Table (3) Pearson correlation coefficient between the degree of participative leadership practice and the professional competency level of principals

Dimensions	Planning and Implementation	Directing	Follow-up and Assessment	Sustainable Professional Growth	Total Degree of the Professional Competency
Participative Professional Practices	**0.769	**0.802	**0.781	**0.809	**0.826
Decision Making	**0.765	**0.798	**0.780	**0.803	**0.822
Participative Principal Characteristics	**0.877	**0.886	**0.828	**0.914	**0.922
Human Relations	**0.849	**0.887	**0.830	**0.907	**0.913
Total Degree of Participative Leadership	**0.866	**.0892	**0.856	**0.910	**0.923

** Statistically significant at (α 00.01)

This result is due to the close practical association between participative leadership practices on one hand, and professional efficiency practices on the other hand, which is consistent to the findings of (Alghamdi, 2014); though it was conducted on higher education settings; that confirmed a strong correlation between leadership personality of university professors and their professional competency.

Conclusion

By answering the questions of this research, the researcher concludes that the ability of the principals to lead kindergartens according to the participative pattern and their ability to lead competencies is the same as that of the professional competencies of the principals, and depends on them mainly. Participative leadership practices associated with planning, organizing, directing, and follow-up and evaluation processes are matched by high professional competency of kindergarten's principals where each depends on the other, so reflected in the high degree of the participative leadership of the principals to the degree of their professional competency and vice versa, the

relationship is a kind of influence. The study of (Almalki, 2014) proved that practicing participative leadership by leaders make them more efficient. The professional competency plays a fundamental role regarding the expected success rates of the students. The results of the (Bush & Glover, 2003) study showed that the success rate of students in the schools under the leadership of distinguished and professional principals was 62.5%, while the repetition rate was 37.5%. The lower the professional competency, the lower the student success rates and the higher repetition rates, reflects the close link between school leadership and student achievement. The study of (Alotaibi, 2010) concluded that a school that has a participative approach produces a cooperative culture and a cooperative, professional, and educational society that resulted in lasting and sustained success for the students, yet it is a place where all members of the educational institution learn. It encourages teachers to work together in a collaboration manner with the school management to teach the students in a better way as they have clear mission and collective responsibility. Therefore, the researcher considers the importance of applying this approach in

kindergartens. The study of (Simkins, 2005) noted that the managerial pattern in kindergartens which is the most common pattern and it is directly and positively associated with negotiation strategies is the participative pattern. In New Zealand, the study of (Lance, Rayner & Szwed, 2007) showed the relation of participative pattern in solving leadership dilemmas in the kindergarten stage, which explains how participative leadership affects the professional competency and thus the progress of the educational process.

Contributions and recommendations:

The research results may contribute in developing principal's job evaluation forms to include participative leadership skills as one of necessary skills of leaders. Also, the research highlights the need to organize training programs to develop educational leadership styles for kindergarten principals. Finally since most of the researches concerning educational leadership have been conducted at all levels of the educational system except the preschool provision, this research will enrich the findings of the educational leadership at early years.

The research recommended establishing training courses for the leaders as regards to self-assessment and decision making for its importance in increasing the professional competency level. Another recommendation involves accommodating a list of the professional competency areas in the performance assessment form for the principals, and utilizing the list of professional competency derived from the research tool in principals' nomination to assure the applicants competency level. Finally, the MOE should provide training and developmental requirements in the leadership practices in general, and the participative leadership in particular for the kindergarten principals through organization of workshops and periodic meetings with kindergarten principals and teachers to introduce of the participative leadership skills, and adopting the participative educational leadership program within the school leadership development program.

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