

Sample/Hypothetical Dissertation Executive Summary



Doctor of Education: Higher Education

Examining relational leadership skills in early childhood administrators

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Introduction: The purpose of the study was to explore the self-perception of relational leadership and communication competence skills of early childhood administrators. This study also sought to explore relationships between early childhood administrator's perception of relational leadership and communication skills and administrator characteristics as well as turnover experienced within their programs.

Problem of Practice: The problem of practice is that a lack of focus exists on the preparation and professional development of early childhood administrators, whereas most are promoted due to their excellent teaching skills, but not prepared for the roles of management and leadership.

Research Method: This was a quantitative study that measured perceived relational leadership skills using Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson's (2008) Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) (Appendix E). Perceived leadership communication competence was measured using Schneider, Maier, Lovrekovic, and Retzbach's (2015) Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire (PLCQ) (Appendix G). Perceived interpersonal communication competence was measured using Rubin and Martin's (1994) Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (Appendix F). Participants for the study were 40 early childhood administrators from the state of New Hampshire.

Summary of Findings: Early childhood administrators rate themselves as having some skills in relation to communication competence and relational leadership. Overall, administrators from licensed and licensed plus programs rated themselves higher than administrators from nationally accredited programs on the measures used in this study. Statistically significant differences were reported based on the education level of early childhood administrators, and the type of program in which they worked, finding that early childhood administrators holding a master's degree ($p = .046$) and employed at nationally accredited programs ($p = .016$) reported higher levels of turnover in their programs within the last 12 months.

Limitation(s) of Study: The study commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic when early childhood programs were closing very quickly across the state impacting the sample size. The study was exploratory in nature and thus cannot be used to determine causal relationships. The use of self-report instruments are appropriate for self-perception outcomes (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1998), but do not provide as much insight into skills as using self and other reports (Atwater et al., 1998).

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Implications/Significance of Study: Since early childhood administrator characteristics, including education level and program type were significant to turnover experienced within the last 12 months, future studies should focus specifically on the relationship that administrators have on turnover. Further, as this study provides insight into the self-perception of relational leadership skills held by NH early childhood administrators, future studies should include the use of targeted professional development and self-reflection, as well as other ratings, to better understand how these administrators are perceived by others and how they may develop their own self-perception of skills through professional development.