

# Leadership Practices of Selected Middle Management Teachers in Kindergartens: Implications for Leadership Training Program

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**Abstract:** This research explores kindergarten middle management teachers' leadership practices in Luoyang City, China, and considers if demographic factors affect assessments of these practices. In acknowledgment of the growing importance of leadership at all levels within institutions of early childhood education, research explores how middle management teachers link to educational quality and operational efficiency. Although having a central role in guiding teachers, coordinating administrative work, and implementing policies, this group is underemphasized in leadership studies. With a quantitative descriptive correlational design, information was gathered from 166 middle management educators through a systematic questionnaire in relation to six leadership styles: school direction, team responsibility, theory-to-practice implementation, rights and climate, awareness of environment, and performance analysis. Mann-Whitney U and Chi-square tests were used in analyzing the data. The findings indicated that participants obtained high average ratings in all leadership aspects, with the highest mean (4.55) being for compliance with educational policies. Nevertheless, categories such as setting strategic goals and applying theory practically had somewhat lower ratings. There were no differences in leadership assessments by gender, age, occupational position, or level of education. These results suggest that leadership potential in this group is influenced more by organizational norms than by personal demographic characteristics. The research indicates that leadership education training programs of the future need to emphasize higher-level leadership skills, especially on collaborative goal-setting and practiced innovation. This study provides important directions for inclusive and pinpointed professional growth planning that can improve leadership effectiveness in early childhood education.

**Keywords:** Middle Management Teachers; Leadership Practices; Kindergarten Education; Professional Development; Demographic Analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of China's economy and the rapid progress of the education sector, kindergarten education has become one of the focal points of societal attention. As the first small society that children encounter, the educational quality and management level of kindergartens have a profound impact on children's growth and future. In this context, research on kindergarten leadership is particularly crucial, as it not only holds significant meaning for improving educational quality but also exerts a far-reaching influence on enhancing educational management standards.

Kindergarten leadership refers to the leadership and management capabilities of principals and teachers towards kindergarten undertakings, encompassing organizational and management skills, emotional intelligence, communication skills, decision-making abilities, and coordination abilities, among others (Xu,2016). In kindergarten education, the role of leadership is of paramount importance, with the vision and style of leaders directly determining the educational quality of kindergartens (Li Dazhi & Liu Jun,2024). However, existing research primarily focuses on the leadership of principals and individual teachers, while relatively little attention has been paid to the leadership of middle managers.

Middle management teachers in kindergartens play a bridging role between the management layer and frontline teachers (Smylie & Eckert, 2017). Their level of leadership practice not only affects the internal teaching management and teacher-student relationships within the kindergarten but also has a crucial impact on the long-term development of the entire kindergarten (Zhang Dejie, 2023). The leadership of middle management teachers is mainly manifested in teacher management, kindergarten teaching management, and the handling of home-school relationships (Hong, Zhu, Liu, & Jiao, 2018). They need to possess certain leadership abilities and management skills to effectively coordinate teaching staff, guide teachers in instructional guidance and motivation, assist teachers in continuously improving their professional levels, and also possess keen observation and analysis skills in education and teaching, as well as good communication skills with parents (Dong Juan,2021).

Nevertheless, current research on the leadership of middle management teachers is still not sufficient, and there is a lack of systematic exploration regarding the assessment and improvement strategies for their leadership practice levels. Therefore, this study aims to explore the assessment and analysis of respondents on the leadership practices of selected kindergarten middle management teachers and investigates whether there are significant differences in leadership influenced by age and education level.

### ***Significance of the Study***

This research is of great importance in the field of early childhood education, where leadership is increasingly seen as a key driver of institutional change. By centering on middle management kindergarten teachers—a group typically neglected in leadership studies—this research offers rich insights into how their leadership practices affect overall educational quality and team functioning. The results inform the empirical knowledge of middle-level leadership competencies, specifically in China's developing preschool education system. Further, the research fills the gap between policy expectation and the true capacity of leaders among

practitioners with evidence-based implications for the development of well-tailored leadership training. Most significantly, the inquiry into whether demographic variables influence perceptions of leadership provides leadership theory with greater depth and encourages inclusivity in capacity development initiatives. The findings not only validate the improvement of training models but also call for a performance-based, inclusive leadership development model, which serves educators, policymakers, and institutional leaders equally.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

The research design of this study aimed to systematically assess the current status of the leadership practice levels of middle management teachers in kindergartens through quantitative descriptive research methods. It explored the leadership capabilities of these middle management teachers and, through correlation analysis, identified the relationships between age, educational background, and leadership. The ultimate goal was to propose targeted strategies for promoting the leadership development of middle management teachers.

### ***Participants***

The study employed a descriptive research design, with a random sample of 166 middle management teachers from Luoyang City, Henan Province serving as respondents. Participants were explicitly middle management teachers, holding both teaching and management responsibilities, bridging administrative management and frontline teaching staff within kindergartens. A pilot test was conducted, yielding a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.976, which indicates good reliability of the instrument.

### ***Instrumentation***

This study employed a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers themselves to collect data on the respondents' evaluations and analyses of the leadership practices of middle management teachers in selected kindergartens. The questionnaire was divided into six main sections: the first section focused on defining the school's direction and development plan; the second section addressed team leadership and accountability; the third section dealt with the transformation of theory into practice and broadening of horizons; the fourth section explored the rights of teachers and students as well as the school atmosphere; the fifth section emphasized environmental awareness and child care; and the sixth section covered teacher performance evaluation. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted on a small group of middle management teachers, and necessary revisions were made based on their feedback. Using SPSS analysis software, the correlation between age, education level, and leadership was analyzed. This questionnaire provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing the impact of middle management teachers' leadership practice levels on the enhancement of leadership training programs.

### ***Data Gathering Procedure***

The data collection process began with administering the questionnaire to 166 middle management teachers in Luoyang City, Henan Province. The questionnaire was made available through an online platform to ensure convenient participation for all responding teachers. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the purpose and

nature of the study to all participants was thoroughly explained, obtaining their informed consent, and emphasizing the principles of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

The online survey was conducted through a secure platform. Respondents were given ample time to complete the questionnaire. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires, all the data for analysis was integrated.

Throughout the data collection process, adherence to all relevant ethical principles and appropriate measures to protect the privacy and rights of the participants were ensured.

### ***Data Analysis***

The research processed and analyzed the data collected from the questionnaires using statistical software to ensure the accuracy of the results. Initially, the research employed descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distributions and mean scores, to analyze the basic demographic characteristics of the respondents, their evaluations of the leadership practices of middle management teachers in the selected kindergartens, and the impact of age and education level on leadership.

The results obtained from the questionnaires were descriptively quantified to determine the mean score and standard deviation of the middle management teachers and their leadership practices in regards to the demographic profile of the respondents. To establish the effect of demographic factors (Gender, Age, job position and Education level) on leadership practices, the researchers used non-parametric tests namely; Mann-Whitney U tests to test for the difference between the two categorical variables that are, Gender and Job position and Chi-square tests for many categorical variables namely, Age and Education level.

These two non-parametric tests were chosen for their ability to perform comparisons of ordinal level of measurement and categorical variables often used in demographic studies. The applied level of significance was equal to 0,05. To obtain reliable and valid results on the relative efficacy of the demographic characteristics to the levels of leadership practice, this approach helped to match statistical methods with the type of data collected properly.

Throughout the data analysis process, rigor and accuracy was ensured in the analysis and adopted appropriate statistical methods to support our conclusions. Through these analyses, the research was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of middle management teachers' leadership practice levels on the enhancement of leadership training programs in kindergartens.

## **RESULTS**

### ***SOP 2. What is the assessment of the respondents on the Selected Middle Management***

#### ***Teachers in Kindergartens leadership PRACTICES?***

Using the six core sections articulated in the research instrument, the assessment of leadership practices of middle management teachers was conducted.

(1) School Direction and Development Plan,

- (2) Team Leadership and Accountability,  
 (3) Theory into Practice and Horizon Expansion,  
 (4) Rights of Teachers and Students, and School Atmosphere,  
 (5) Environmental Awareness and Child Care,  
 (6) Teacher Performance Evaluation.

Table 1 provides a summary of the mean and standard deviations across the sections, where the teachers' identified leadership practices and their verbal interpretations based on the respondents' observations are presented. The second set of the results involves the comparison of the leadership evaluations by demographic variables, namely gender, age, job rank, and education level.

**Table1.** Leadership Practices of Kindergarten Middle Management Teachers

Section (Grouping)	Leadership Practice Item	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. School Direction and Development Plan	Clarifying direction of kindergarten education	4.37	0.723	Full Compliance
	Clear understanding of kindergarten's current development status	4.34	0.717	Full Compliance
	Understanding of kindergarten's advantages, disadvantages, and challenges	4.29	0.714	Full Compliance
	Adherence to preschool education policies and regulations	4.55	0.608	Full Compliance
	Accurate formulation of kindergarten plans	4.31	0.683	Full Compliance
	2. Team Leadership and Accountability	Leading kindergarten members towards goals	4.2	0.73
Supervision and evaluation of kindergarten plans		4.16	0.722	Full Compliance
3. Theory into Practice and Horizon Expansion	Theoretical and vision transformation abilities	4.1	0.725	Basically Match

	Possession of correct educational values	4.51	0.61	Full Compliance
4. Rights of Teachers and Students, School Atmosphere	Respecting and protecting the rights of teachers and students	4.51	0.579	Full Compliance
	Prudent use of relevant laws and procedures	4.45	0.656	Full Compliance
	Guidance of teachers in kindergarten planning	4.42	0.671	Full Compliance
	Developing kindergarten's cultural traditions	4.28	0.702	Full Compliance
5. Environmental Awareness and Child Care	Building elegant campus and democratic atmosphere	4.34	0.646	Full Compliance
	Good kindergarten environment and reputation	4.37	0.616	Full Compliance
	Environment reflecting educational philosophy	4.31	0.637	Full Compliance
6. Teacher Performance Evaluation	Establishing care- and education-centered teaching style	4.27	0.663	Full Compliance
	Disseminating shared vision	4.41	0.652	Full Compliance

According to Table 1, the comprehensive evaluation of middle management teachers' leadership in kindergartens can be analyzed from four aspects.

**(1) Overall Leadership Ability:**

The average score for the overall leadership ability of kindergarten middle management teachers is 4.35, which is close to the full score of 5. This indicates that, on the whole, kindergarten middle management teachers possess strong leadership abilities and have received high evaluations.

The standard deviation is 0.476, which is relatively low, suggesting that there is little variation in leadership abilities among managers, and their overall performance is relatively consistent.

**(2) Analysis of Specific Leadership Abilities:**

In most areas, kindergarten managers' leadership abilities have been rated as "fully compliant," such as their ability to clarify the direction of the school, adhere to the party's policies and preschool education regulations, and possess correct educational values.

A few areas have been rated as "basically compliant," including their ability to lead school members in achieving development goals (4.2) and their strong theoretical and vision transformation abilities (4.1). These may be areas where managers need further improvement.

**(3) Key Leadership Abilities:**

The ability to adhere to the party's policies and preschool education regulations has received the highest average score (4.55), indicating that managers excel in this area and strictly comply with relevant policies and regulations.

Respecting and protecting the rights and dignity of teachers and students has also received a high score (4.51), reflecting managers' emphasis on and protection of teachers' and students' rights.

The pursuit of high-quality school philosophy (4.42) and the establishment of a comprehensive teacher performance evaluation mechanism (4.3) also demonstrate managers' efforts in improving education quality and teacher management.

**(4) Room for Improvement:**

For the areas of "leading school members in achieving development goals" and "possessing strong theoretical and vision transformation abilities," middle management teachers may need to enhance their team collaboration and goal management skills, as well as their ability to translate theories and visions into practical actions.

Furthermore, despite their overall strong leadership abilities, managers should continue to learn and improve to adapt to the constantly changing educational environment.

Kindergarten middle management teachers' leadership abilities have received high evaluations overall, but there is still room for improvement. By strengthening team collaboration, goal management, and theoretical transformation skills, managers can further enhance their leadership abilities and make greater contributions to the development of kindergartens.

SOP 5. Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the respondents on the leadership practices of the selected middle management teachers in kindergartens when the demographic profile is used as test factor?

**Table2.** Comparison According to Gender

	Group	N	Mean	SD	U	p	Significance	
Kindergarten	middle management	1	9	4.55	0.397	528	0.204	Not

teachers leadership ability	2	157	4.34	0.48	Significant
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Table 2 presents a comparison of the assessment results of kindergarten middle management teachers' leadership abilities based on gender grouping.

Group 1 represents male respondents (N=9) with a mean score of 4.55 and a standard deviation of 0.397. Group 2 represents female respondents (N=157) with a mean score of 4.34 and a standard deviation of 0.48.

The results indicate that although there is a difference in the average leadership ability assessment between the two groups, the statistical test yields a p-value of 0.204, which is greater than the significance level ( $P \geq 0.05$ ). Therefore, the difference between the two groups is not significant, suggesting that gender does not have a significant impact on leadership abilities.

Table3. Comparison According to Age

	age	N	Mean	SD	$\chi^2$	p	Significance
Kindergarten middle management teachers leadership ability	1	40	4.35	0.488	3.12	0.374	Not Significant
	2	85	4.3	0.479			
	3	34	4.46	0.463			
	4	7	4.46	0.471			

According to Table 3, the survey divides age into four stages, with the mean values fluctuating between 4.3 and 4.46 for each age group, and the standard deviations ranging from 0.463 to 0.488. The p-value of the  $\chi^2$  test is 0.374 ( $P \geq 0.05$ ), indicating that age differences have no significant impact on the respondents' assessments.

Table4. Comparison According to Job

	Group	N	Mean	SD	U	p	Significance
Kindergarten middle management teachers leadership ability	1	80	4.39	0.421	3263	0.567	Not Significant
	2	86	4.31	0.524			

According to the comparison of assessment results for kindergarten managers' leadership abilities based on job positions in Table 4:

Group 1 (a certain position, N=80) has a mean of 4.39 with a standard deviation of 0.421.

Group 2 (another position, N=86) has a mean of 4.31 with a standard deviation of 0.524.

The p-value of the U test is 0.567 ( $P \geq 0.05$ ), indicating that job position differences have no significant impact on the respondents' assessments.

Table5. Comparison According to Educational Level

	Educational level	N	Mean	SD	$\chi^2$	p	Significance
Kindergarten middle management teachers leadership ability	1	60	4.38	0.446		0.604	Not Significant
	2	104	4.33	0.497	1.009		
	3	2	4.64	0.438			

Comparison of Kindergarten middle management teachers' Leadership Abilities with Educational Levels in Table 5: The study is divided into three educational level groups, with the highest educational level group having the highest mean (4.64), but an extremely small sample size (N=2). The overall  $\chi^2$  test yields a p-value of 0.604 ( $P \geq 0.05$ ), indicating that differences in educational levels do not have a significant impact on the respondents' assessments. However, it should be noted that the small sample size of the high educational level group may affect the robustness of the results.

## DISCUSSION

### Comprehensive Discussion on the Leadership Abilities of Kindergarten Middle Management Teachers

The results of this study indicate that kindergarten middle management teachers in general are seen as having strong leadership practice across all of the six dimensions studied. Based on overall average score of 4.35 out of 5, findings show that respondents appreciate these teachers' well with regards to school direction management, leading teams, safeguarding rights, quality management, performance and applying theory into practice. These results are reinforcing the expanding role that middle management teachers play in the governance and strategic operations of kindergartens.

This finding supports Zhang (2023), who noted that middle managers are channels between administrative administration and teaching in the classrooms, playing an important role in staff development as well as in shaping institutional culture. Hong et al. (2018) also noted that strong middle-level leadership improves communication, collaboration, and curriculum planning—key aspects demonstrated in the high scores obtained in this study on policy compliance (4.55), ethical principles (4.51), and team management (4.42).

Among the most significant findings in this study is that there are no statistically significant differences between gender, age, position of work, and level of education in leadership evaluation. This points to the conclusion that leadership in kindergartens is not as affected by demographic traits and more influenced by institutional expectations, common values, and standardized structures of professional growth. Like Smylie and Eckert (2017) insist, effective leadership is developed in a systematic mode of learning, mentoring, and institutional support and not just inherited characteristics or demographics.

This uniformity in scores is due to the standardized pedagogical and regulatory structures followed by kindergartens throughout Luoyang, as highlighted by Li and Liu (2024). Due to government-mandated training standards and professional certification, most teachers undergo the same professional training, which can be the reason for the uniformity in leadership assessments.

Although the outcomes are largely favorable, there remain some areas with room for enhancement. In particular, the aspects "Team Leadership and Accountability" and "Theory into Practice and Horizon Expansion" had relatively lower mean scores (4.2 and 4.1, respectively). These are the areas that indicate problems in strategic execution and innovation—areas that call for adaptive intelligence, collaborative leadership, and a capacity to respond to emergent challenges. These are second-order leadership roles, which perhaps are not yet accomplished by all middle management instructors.

The lack of broad differences by demographic groups also hints at a possibly inclusive leadership context in Luoyang's kindergartens. That is, leadership roles might be spread evenly irrespective of gender, age, or work seniority—implying a culture valuing competence and teamwork over hierarchical considerations. That is a positive, but this also points toward the necessity to move away from demographic markers to building leadership capacities.

It is crucial to understand the demographic neutrality of these results not as an indicator that demographics don't matter, but that the present professional climate buffers these differences with institutional support and collective leadership objectives.

These results have specific implications for the development of targeted leadership development programs. Given that participants are already strong in compliance-related topics, ethical leadership, and general management, upcoming training must break away from these foundational areas and target more complex competencies. These include strategic planning, curriculum leadership for innovation, change leadership in schools, and data-driven decision-making.

The poorer performance in the application of theory to practice indicates a disconnect between what is learned in professional development courses and the implementation of those concepts within classroom or administrative settings. Leadership development ought thus to involve experiential simulations, mentoring partnerships, and reflective activities that serve to connect the dots. Courses might also involve scenario-based case learning, role-playing, and action-research projects so that middle management educators can experiment and implement leadership theories in real-world settings.

Since demographic factors weren't highly correlated with leadership performance, leadership development should incorporate a universal design—available to all employees irrespective of experience or education—yet permit flexible, modular content based on self-diagnosed needs or institutional objectives. Professional learning communities and cross-role collaboration can be useful too, promoting shared learning and multiple perspectives.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research affirmed that kindergarten middle management teachers exhibit good leadership skills on all six dimensions measured, with especially high levels in policy observance and right protection. The results support past studies highlighting leadership as crucial to quality education and institutional stability (Hong, Zhu, Liu, & Jiao, 2018). Interestingly, there were no appreciable differences in the evaluations of leadership by gender, age, position, or educational level, suggesting that effectiveness at leadership is less related to the individual's

demographics and more so to institutional training and culture. Lower scores for areas such as goal-setting and application of theory, though, suggest potential targeted development. These findings highlight the need to create professional development programs that target advanced leadership skills, particularly those that promote strategic thinking and teamwork. In general, this study provides useful information for policy and practice, calling for a more inclusive, performance-driven approach to leadership development in early childhood education.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The comprehensive evaluation and analysis of middle management teacher's leadership in kindergartens reveal that the overall leadership abilities of kindergarten administrators are strong and widely recognized, with relatively small differences in leadership abilities among individual administrators, indicating a high degree of consistency. In terms of specific leadership skills, administrators excel in defining the school's direction, adhering to policies and regulations, and possessing correct educational values. However, there is still room for improvement in their abilities to lead school members in achieving developmental goals and converting theories into visions. Furthermore, administrators demonstrate outstanding performance in key leadership areas such as adhering to policies, protecting the rights and interests of teachers and students, pursuing high-quality education, and establishing effective teacher performance evaluation mechanisms. This reflects their high emphasis on educational quality and the well-being of teachers and students. These data provide valuable insights for kindergartens to further enhance the leadership abilities of administrators and improve educational quality.

In addition, the investigation into the relationship between age, gender, job, education level, and leadership reveal several key points. Firstly, when selecting and cultivating middle management teachers in kindergartens, it is important to focus more on their leadership abilities and professional qualities, rather than overly emphasizing personal characteristics such as gender and age. Secondly, although job position and education level reflect the respondents' professional background and expertise to a certain extent, they have not shown a decisive impact on the evaluation of the leadership practices of middle management teachers in kindergartens. This further emphasizes the importance of leadership abilities and professional qualities in the evaluation, rather than just the level of job position or education.

Furthermore, given that demographic characteristics have no significant impact on the evaluation results, kindergartens should pay more attention to a comprehensive assessment of leadership abilities and professional qualities when selecting and cultivating middle management teachers. At the same time, tailored training plans and improvement strategies should be developed to meet the individualized development needs of each teacher, in order to promote their continuous improvement in leadership abilities.

Finally, although this study has reached some meaningful conclusions, there are still some limitations. Future research can further increase the sample size, especially the sample size of the high education level group, to more accurately assess the impact of education level on the evaluation results. Additionally, other factors that may affect the evaluation results, such as cultural background and work experience, can be explored to provide a more comprehensive evaluation perspective.

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