



## EUROPEAN APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION LEADERS AND THEIR ADAPTATION FOR UZBEKISTAN

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**ANNOTATION:** *This article examines advanced European and Oceanian approaches to developing management competencies among preschool education leaders, focusing on practices from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and New Zealand. These systems emphasize pedagogical leadership, strategic planning, inclusive management, psychological safety, and digital governance. The study analyzes the structural mechanisms used to train and support directors in these countries and evaluates their applicability to Uzbekistan's preschool sector. Recommendations are proposed for integrating relevant international practices into national policy, including competency-based leadership training, mentoring programs, digital management systems, and psychological safety frameworks to improve institutional quality and leadership effectiveness.*

**KEYWORDS:** *management competency, preschool leadership, European models, pedagogical leadership, strategic management, inclusive education, digital governance, mentoring, psychological safety, innovation.*

### INTRODUCTION

The development of management competencies among preschool education leaders has become a central priority in global education policy, particularly in countries where early childhood education is recognized as a foundational stage of human development.<sup>5</sup> In high-performing systems such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and New

Zealand, the role of the preschool director extends far beyond administrative oversight and is conceptualized as a form of pedagogical leadership that directly influences the quality of children's early learning experiences.<sup>6</sup> These countries demonstrate that the effectiveness of preschool institutions is strongly dependent on leaders who possess well-developed competencies in strategic management, human resource

<sup>5</sup> Bottery, M. (2006). Educational leaders in a globalising world: a new set of priorities?. *School Leadership and Management*, 26(1), 5-22.

<sup>6</sup> Nusche, D., Radinger, T., Busemeyer, M. R., & Theisens, H. OECD Reviews of School Resources.



development, pedagogical supervision, communication, and the creation of psychologically safe environments.

In Finland, for example, preschool directors act as instructional leaders who guide teachers in implementing play-based learning philosophies, monitor children's developmental progress, and ensure alignment with national curricula.<sup>7</sup> Leadership training programs emphasize analytical decision-making, collaborative planning, and the use of evidence-based practices. Sweden prioritizes inclusive leadership, requiring directors to ensure equitable access, support children with diverse needs, and foster strong partnerships with families and communities.

The Swedish model highlights that effective leaders must cultivate team motivation, involve staff in problem-solving, and maintain transparent communication to improve institutional culture.<sup>8</sup> Denmark demonstrates that psychological safety is a core leadership competency, as children's emotional well-being is considered a primary indicator of institutional quality. Directors receive systematic training on conflict resolution, staff well-being, and

the creation of emotionally supportive learning environments.

Norway offers a unified national leadership development framework focusing on strategic planning, teamwork, governance, and reflective practice, ensuring that directors continuously update their skills.<sup>9</sup> New Zealand's Te Whāriki curriculum positions leaders as cultural navigators responsible for building inclusive, community-connected learning environments and promoting innovation in teaching.<sup>10</sup> For Uzbekistan, where preschool reforms are rapidly expanding, these international experiences provide valuable guidance for strengthening leadership training, modernizing management structures, and improving educational outcomes. The need to develop a competency-based leadership model that integrates strategic governance, pedagogical supervision, digital management, and psychological safety is increasingly clear. Studying global leadership practices can support Uzbekistan in creating a modern preschool system driven by strong, well-prepared institutional leaders.

## METHODS

<sup>7</sup> Lähdesmäki, S., Maunumäki, M., & Nurmi, T. (2024). Play is the base! ECEC leaders' views on the development of digital pedagogy. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 52(8), 1897-1910.

<sup>8</sup> Holmberg, I., & Åkerblom, S. (2006). Modelling leadership-Implicit leadership theories in Sweden. *Scandinavian journal of management*, 22(4), 307-329.

<sup>9</sup> Ljunggren, B., & Moen, K. H. (2019). Implementing the Norwegian framework plan—organizational and leadership translation strategies. *Leadership in early education in times of change. Research from five continents*, 187-200.

<sup>10</sup> Chan, A. (2019). Te Whāriki: An early childhood curriculum in a superdiverse New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(2), 245-259.



This study employed a comparative qualitative research design to analyze how leading early childhood education systems develop management competencies among preschool directors and to determine the transferability of these practices to Uzbekistan. The methodological approach combined document analysis, competency framework comparison, and thematic synthesis. Key policy documents, leadership training guidelines, national curricula, and official regulatory acts from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and New Zealand were examined to identify structural features of leadership development.<sup>11</sup> Peer-reviewed academic publications, OECD reports, and UNESCO early childhood leadership studies provided additional data sources. The analysis focused on five major competency domains: pedagogical leadership, strategic management, human resource development, inclusive and psychological safety practices, and digital governance. Using these domains, the study systematically compared each country's leadership preparation mechanisms, including pre-service training, in-service professional development, mentoring systems, performance evaluation tools, and organizational support structures.

A coding framework was applied to identify recurring themes and country-specific innovations. In addition, alignment between European competency standards and Uzbekistan's current preschool leadership expectations was examined through normative comparison. This allowed for identifying gaps, convergence points, and potential areas for adaptation. A suitability analysis was then conducted to assess which international practices could be realistically integrated into Uzbekistan's cultural, institutional, and regulatory context.

The criteria used were relevance to national reform priorities, feasibility within existing administrative structures, resource requirements, and compatibility with Uzbekistan's pedagogical traditions. The research also incorporated a cross-case synthesis approach, enabling the identification of shared principles across all five countries, such as the centrality of pedagogical leadership, the importance of psychological safety, or the institutionalization of ongoing professional development. These shared elements served as the foundation for developing locally adaptable recommendations. The methodological strength of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of multiple advanced education systems and its focus on practical implementation pathways rather than abstract policy comparison. Overall, this methods framework provided a rigorous basis for generating

<sup>11</sup> Møller, J., & Schratz, M. (2009). Leadership development in Europe. In *International handbook on the preparation and development of school leaders* (pp. 341-366). Routledge.



evidence-informed recommendations for enhancing leadership competency development in Uzbekistan's preschool sector.

## RESULTS

The findings reveal substantial similarities in how Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and New Zealand conceptualize and cultivate leadership competencies among preschool directors, despite differences in governance structures and cultural contexts.<sup>12</sup> Across all five systems, preschool leaders are understood primarily as pedagogical leaders rather than administrative managers. Finland demonstrates that directors are expected to guide curriculum implementation, support teachers' professional growth, lead evidence-based instructional decision-making, and foster a collaborative learning culture. Training programs emphasize reflective leadership, developmental observation, and data-driven planning. Sweden's results show that leadership competencies are strongly tied to inclusion, equity, and child-centered philosophies, with directors responsible for creating accessible learning environments and coordinating multidisciplinary support services. Staff motivation, shared decision-making, and

democratic leadership approaches emerged as central Swedish practices.

Denmark's results highlight the priority placed on psychological safety, where directors must understand child emotional development, promote staff well-being, and build nurturing organizational climates.<sup>13</sup> Leadership programs in Denmark focus on conflict resolution, empathetic communication, and socio-emotional leadership. Norway's findings show a well-structured, nationally coordinated leadership development system that ensures consistency across the country. Norwegian programs strengthen strategic planning, teamwork, governance skills, and analytical decision-making, supported by mandatory leadership training for newly appointed directors. New Zealand's results emphasize culturally responsive leadership shaped by Te Whāriki, requiring directors to integrate indigenous values, collaborate with families, and promote innovative pedagogical practices.<sup>14</sup> A cross-system synthesis reveals five universal leadership competency clusters: pedagogical leadership, strategic and organizational management, human resource

<sup>12</sup> Halttunen, L., Sims, M., Waniganayake, M., Hadley, F., Bøe, M., Hognestad, K., & Heikka, J. (2019). Working as early childhood centre directors and deputies—perspectives from Australia, Finland and Norway. *Leadership in early education in times of change: Research from five continents*, 231-252.

<sup>13</sup> Kristensen, A., & Edvardsen, M. E. Leadership and Legal Competence: The Key to a Good Kindergarten Environment.

<sup>14</sup> Santamaría, A. P., Webber, M., Santamaría, L. J., & Dam, L. I. (2015). Partnership for Change: Promoting Effective Leadership Practices for Indigenous Educational Success in Aotearoa New Zealand. *EJEP: EJournal of Education Policy*.



development, inclusive and psychological safety-oriented leadership, and digital management competence.

When compared to Uzbekistan's current preschool leadership system, the results show both strengths and gaps. Uzbekistan has begun implementing competency-based standards and digital monitoring systems, but lacks structured mentoring programs, nationally unified leadership training frameworks, and models that integrate pedagogical and administrative roles. The findings indicate that adopting components from these international systems-especially pedagogical leadership from Finland, inclusivity from Sweden, psychological safety from Denmark, strategic leadership from Norway, and cultural responsiveness from New Zealand-would significantly enhance leadership development in Uzbekistan's preschool sector.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion of these findings highlights the implications of integrating international leadership development models into Uzbekistan's preschool education context. One major point is that the five countries studied share a common belief that strong preschool leadership directly influences teaching quality, learning environments, and child outcomes. This contrasts with traditional managerial perceptions of directors in some post-Soviet contexts, where administrative tasks may overshadow pedagogical responsibilities. For Uzbekistan, the shift toward pedagogical

leadership represents a transformative change requiring systemic support, revised training content, and cultural acceptance among educators. Finland's model demonstrates that directors who engage in curriculum implementation and teacher mentoring contribute significantly to sustained quality improvement. Applying this in Uzbekistan would require redesigning leadership standards to explicitly include instructional supervision and reflective practice. The Swedish focus on inclusion reveals another critical implication: leadership training must prepare directors to support diverse learners and coordinate multidisciplinary services.

Uzbekistan's expanding inclusion policies would benefit from structured modules on inclusive leadership and collaboration with families. Denmark's emphasis on psychological safety shows that leadership is not only about managing processes but also about nurturing relationships and emotional well-being. In Uzbekistan, where class sizes and staff workload can be high, directors would need training in socio-emotional leadership, conflict resolution, and workplace culture development. Norway's centralized leadership programs highlight the necessity of a national framework that ensures consistency, quality, and progressive skill development.

Uzbekistan currently lacks a unified, tiered leadership development system, suggesting an opportunity to



create a structured program aligned with national reforms. New Zealand's culturally responsive leadership shows that effective management must be rooted in local values. This aligns well with Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage, suggesting that any adopted model must integrate national traditions, multilingual contexts, and community expectations. Overall, the discussion affirms that international practices cannot be transplanted directly; rather, they must be adapted to local institutional realities. The convergence of global best practices with Uzbekistan's cultural and educational priorities can create a hybrid leadership development model that is both modern and contextually meaningful.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that European and Oceanian leadership development models provide valuable insights for strengthening management competencies among preschool directors in Uzbekistan. The analysis demonstrates that Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and New Zealand share several foundational principles: leadership as a pedagogical rather than purely administrative function, continuous professional development, strong emphasis on inclusion and psychological safety, collaborative governance, and integration of digital tools into management processes. Each of these principles aligns with Uzbekistan's ongoing preschool reforms, indicating strong potential for adaptation. The study identifies five transferable competency

domains: pedagogical leadership, strategic management, human resource development, inclusive and psychological safety leadership, and digital governance.

Finland's play-based instructional leadership, Sweden's inclusivity-driven management, Denmark's socio-emotional leadership, Norway's structured national leadership programs, and New Zealand's culturally responsive approach each offer components that can be integrated into Uzbekistan's context. To achieve this, several recommendations emerge. First, Uzbekistan should establish a national leadership development framework that outlines required competencies, career pathways, and continuous professional development cycles. Second, leadership preparation programs should include practical modules such as mentoring, coaching, reflective practice, and collaborative problem-solving, drawing on Scandinavian models of shared leadership.

Third, a psychological safety standard should be incorporated into preschool management guidelines to support staff well-being and child emotional development. Fourth, digital governance tools should be strengthened to improve monitoring, communication, and data-driven decision-making. Finally, adaptation must be culturally grounded; leadership training should integrate Uzbek values, multilingual realities, and community engagement traditions.



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