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School and early childhood education leaders' views of their own leadership competences and need for development

This article discusses how leaders working in early childhood education centres and comprehensive schools view their own leadership competences and need to develop them. In this study, we focused on the aspect of leaders' self-management, and we aimed at gaining an understanding of whether leaders feel they have sufficient skills for performing their current duties, as well as what kind of skills and needs for development they have. The data are leaders' responses (N = 87) to an electronic survey consisting of both Likert-scale and open-ended questions. Leaders participating in this study were about to start their in-service training on leadership in education at the University of Helsinki, and the data collection was one part of the assessment and development of that training in 2018. The data were analysed by using non-parametric statistical methods and theory-directed content analysis. Early childhood education centre and school leaders' responses were classified in accordance with a competency hierarchy model. The results indicate that leaders were very keen to develop themselves, prepared to take on new tasks and challenges, and, if necessary, ready to change their practices. The leaders described the strengths and challenges mainly at the level of basic management, while the level of leadership in public relations and symbolic tasks remained scarce in their descriptions.