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Doctoral School "Education, Reflection, Development"

The Effects of Positive Education Training on the Personal and

Professional Well-Being of Kindergarten Teachers

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List of Published Articles

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Abstract

The current doctoral thesis focuses on the importance of the personal and professional well-being of kindergarten teachers (KTs) in order to promote a quality and inclusive kindergarten climate. Personal well-being is a multidimensional concept that includes positive emotions, involvement, healthy relationships, a sense of meaning and achievement (Seligman, 2002). KTs with high personal well-being can create an inviting and nurturing learning climate that supports growth and learning (Wong & Zhang, 2014). The purpose of the research is to test the effect of the Positive Education training program for Well-being (PEW) on the personal and professional well-being of KTs and the kindergarten climate.

Participants - The research involved 77 female KTs. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group of 38 KTs who underwent the PEW training program, and a control group of 39 KTs who only completed the questionnaires.

Research tools – This research was conducted using a mixed-method paradigm. The systematic literature review in this research was executed according to the PRISMA flow method, and reviewed articles from the last decade. The quantitative study in this research used 2 questionnaires for measuring personal well-being: The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999; Hebrew version), Satisfaction With Life Scale - (SWLS - Diener et al., 1985); a questionnaire for measuring professional well-being Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (TSWQ - Renshaw et al., 2015); and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) for teachers questionnaire to measure the kindergarten climate. The qualitative study in this research included an analysis of semi structured interviews and reflected diaries of the participants.

Theoretical fundamentals - The research is based on eight humanistic and educational theories. The PEW training program is based on two central theoretical models: the PERMA model of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) and the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) model (CASEL, 2005).

The main findings of this doctoral research suggest that the PEW training program had a positive contribution to the personal and professional well-being of

KTs and on their perceptions of the kindergarten climate. The training program helped to reduce the KTs stress levels and improved their job satisfaction, personal and professional relationships, confidence and self-esteem. It was found according to the analysis done in the qualitative study that KTs emphasized the positive contribution of the supportive community that was created in the training program, and the importance of developing training programs with personal development content, and not just professional pedagogical content.

Conclusions - The systematic literature review highlighted the importance of investing in KTs' well-being to improve early education quality, despite being an under-researched area. The training program "Positive Education for Well-being" (PEW) was found to promote KTs' personal and professional well-being, sense of competence and belonging. It positively impacted the kindergarten climate by reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction. Qualitative findings indicated the program enhanced calmness, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, personal growth and the ability to cope with challenges. However, it did not significantly address external burnout factors like workload and lack of systemic support. Overall, KTs' increased well-being contributed to a more positive, inclusive kindergarten environment for children.

Introduction

The doctoral study examines the demanding roles and responsibilities of KTs that put them at high risk of burnout, fatigue, stress and emotional exhaustion (Gooze, 2014; Yang et al., 2018; Benevene et al., 2018; Jennings, 2015). KTs experiencing burnout are less able to provide social-emotional support to students (Roberts et al., 2016; Spilt et al., 2011). Promoting positive climate through social-emotional learning (SEL), positive education and mindfulness can help develop KTs' communication, emotional regulation and respect abilities to better support students (Bierman & Motamedi, 2015; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Brock & Curby, 2014; Denham et al., 2010; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992).

Problem Statement - KTs face highly demanding and stressful working conditions that require an emotional, holistic approach to caring for young children (Grant et al., 2019; Britto et al., 2017). However, their 3-5 year teacher training focuses mainly on pedagogical aspects with little preparation for coping with challenges like stress, burnout, children with special needs, and lack of social support from supervisors and colleagues (Zhu et al., 2019). This negatively impacts KTs' personal and professional well-being, leading to issues like anxiety, decreased motivation, depression and high turnover rates that can undermine teaching quality, child-teacher relationships and child development (Grant et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2022). Despite KTs' vital role, they struggle with maintaining their own mental well-being. Prior research highlights the need for interventions to strengthen KTs' coping strategies and well-being (Lee et al., 2022; Mahmood, 2013), as existing evidence on positive psychological programs for teachers remains limited (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022; Datu et al., 2022), especially in non-Western contexts where training durations may be insufficient for the demands faced (Hendriks et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019).

Gaps in Knowledge – While studies on positive education have been conducted in school settings (Seligman et al., 2009; Norrish & Seligman, 2015), relatively few have focused on early childhood education environments. Most prior research has examined the effects of positive education on children rather than the educational staff (Vorkapić & Vujičić, 2013; Shoshani et al., 2017).

The systematic literature review revealed a consistent body of research on educators' personal and professional well-being over the years, with increased interest

following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, none of these studies explored the effects of positive education specifically on KTs.

There is a lack of mental health training and emotional literacy skills for teachers, alongside pressure for academic achievement and neglect of teacher well-being, hindering the promotion of children's psychological well-being (Nikolaou & Stamatis, 2022). While Israel has programs aimed at creating a positive kindergarten climate and improving KT resilience, such as the Resilience "Hosen" Program (Laor, 2017) and the Magic Circle (Mintz et al., 1985), they do not emphasize the KT's personal process and necessary skills.

Research Aims - The current study aims to empower the KTs in terms of their personal and professional well-being based on theories and approaches from Positive Psychology and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) The training program conducted in this study is called Positive Education for Well-being (PEW). The researcher has developed the PEW training program according to principles of positive psychology, which were selected specially for this study addressing the needs of KTs. The training program aims to examine the effects of a positive education approach on KT's well-being and their perception of the kindergarten's climate.

1. Chapter I. Theoretical Fundaments

The chapter presents the theoretical background that forms the basis of the research's three phases. Four of the theories are humanistic and relate to person's development and what affects it. Four additional theories are educational and relate to education approaches.

1.1. The Humanistic Approach

The humanist approach focuses on fulfilling and expanding the human experience (Bugental, 1963; Rogers, 1961). It emerged in education in the 1970s, shifting from traditional behaviorist learning to an approach viewing students as having an inner world impacting their personal development alongside cognitive growth (Khatib et al., 2013; Qin, 2007; Aloni, 2007).

Humanistic principles include valuing individual self-worth, treating emotions as importantly as facts, and viewing social/personal development as meaningful as

intellectual development (Aloni, 2007). It promotes a moral climate of caring, self-acceptance and inclusion (Arnold, 1998; Brumfit, 1984).

Humanistic education aims to facilitate an environment for realizing personal potential, addressing both emotional and intellectual dimensions through emotional discourse and individualized learning processes (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). It emphasizes self-discovery, introspection, self-esteem, empathy and positive relationships (Mishra, 2000).

1.2. Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) suggests that personal well-being is influenced by the individual's environment and interactions across multiple nested systems. The microsystem comprises the individual's immediate settings like family, school, and neighborhood. The mesosystem represents the interactions between those microsystems. The exosystem encompasses broader community connections indirectly impacting the individual. The macrosystem refers to the overarching cultural and societal context (Smith et al., 2004). The chronosystem, added later, considers how these systems change over time due to life transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The theory emphasizes the bidirectional influences between systems - an educator's own social, ideological and personal development impacts how they shape the student's development across those same domains. Understanding human development requires examining the complex interplay between the individual and their layered ecological environments. This holistic perspective highlights how supporting teachers' well-being across various systems can create nurturing conditions for children's growth.

1.3. Activity Flow Theory

The Activity Flow theory, developed by Levin (1989), emphasizes creating a kindergarten environment that fosters a sense of family and allows for the expression of each child's individuality. Drawing on Piaget's (1999) ideas of child-driven learning, the theory avoids rigid expectations and instead prioritizes free play and activities that spark curiosity and initiative (Dayan, 2005). The KTs play a crucial role by acting as facilitators, providing a variety of stimulating activities and maintaining a safe and encouraging space (Levin, 1989; Burman, 2016). This approach

acknowledges children as whole individuals with social, emotional, and cognitive needs (Crain, 1992; Kamii & DeVries, 1980). Through continuous dialogue and observation, KTs can tailor their involvement to best support each child's development (Levin, 1989). The theory positions the kindergarten experience as a continuous flow of activities encompassing play, work, learning, and creation, all nurtured by a spirit of exploration and self-discovery (Levin, 1989; Rapp, 1980).

1.4. Positive Psychology

Positive psychology, emerging in the late 20th century by Martin Seligman, studies how people flourish and function at their best (Seligman, 2000, 2002, 2009, 2011). This approach emphasizes understanding and fostering positive emotions, character strengths, and healthy relationships to empower individuals and promote well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A core concept is "flow," a state of focused concentration and enjoyment experienced during activities that challenge our skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). By understanding flow and other positive aspects of human experience, researchers believe we can improve quality of life and create a more positive and productive society (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Positive psychology's growing influence has led to its potential applications in various fields, including education (Seligman, 2009).

1.5. Positive Education

Positive education goes beyond traditional academics, aiming to cultivate happiness, well-being, and character strengths alongside knowledge and skills (Seligman et al., 2009; Green et al., 2011). It emphasizes positive emotions like optimism and gratitude, which research suggests lead to greater resilience and success (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004, 2013). Positive education programs have gone through several phases. Initially, they focused on interventions for students, but now encompass creating a supportive environment for the entire school community (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021). This includes teacher well-being, as research shows happy and supported teachers have a positive impact on students (Tatalović Vorkapić & Velan, 2023).

More recently, the focus has shifted towards integrating positive education principles into existing educational frameworks, rather than creating entirely separate

programs (Slemp et al., 2017). The PERMA model (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments) by Seligman (2011) is a core concept in positive education. This model highlights the importance of various aspects of well-being for fostering student success and growth (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014; Norrish et al., 2013).

1.6. Positive Pedagogy: Fostering Personal Well-Being in Educational Settings

Positive education, which combines positive psychology principles with educational practices, aims to cultivate well-being alongside academic learning in students (Green et al., 2011). It's implemented through programs that target positive relationships, goal-setting, and activities that create a sense of purpose (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004, 2013). Positive pedagogy, rooted in positive psychology and education, is designed to specifically promote well-being in educational settings (Norrish et al., 2013).

Schools play a significant role in shaping children's development and well-being (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2009). Positive pedagogy emphasizes fostering positive emotions, supporting children's autonomy, and building strong relationships (Ranta & Hyvärinen, 2022). This can be achieved through strong teacher-child relationships, providing developmentally appropriate activities, and fostering a sense of belonging among students (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Pietarinen et al., 2014). Positive pedagogy also emphasizes the importance of teachers reflecting on their practice and incorporating character strengths into their teaching (White, 2021). By creating nurturing and enriching environments, positive pedagogy empowers teachers and improves student well-being (Ranta et al., 2022).

1.7. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes that our environment plays a crucial role in fulfilling our basic psychological needs, which in turn motivates us. These three basic needs are for autonomy (expressing ourselves freely), competence (feeling capable), and relatedness (having strong connections with others). When these needs are met, we experience greater autonomous motivation, leading to

positive emotions, self-confidence, and optimal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Huppert & So, 2013).

SDT is particularly important in education. By supporting students' psychological needs, teachers can foster their autonomous motivation, leading to better engagement, academic success, and overall well-being (Feinberg et al., 2008; Kaplan & Assor, 2012). This works for teachers as well. When teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and connection are met, they experience greater satisfaction and motivation, ultimately leading to better teaching (Roth et al., 2007). Therefore, creating environments that support these needs is essential for both students and teachers (Franks et al., 2023; La Guardia, 2009).

1.8. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a theory that emphasizes developing social and emotional skills alongside academic learning (CASEL, 2020). It focuses on well-being, resilience, and helping students manage emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg et al., 2015). This is seen as crucial in today's world, where students need to be adaptable and self-directed learners (Laskey & Hetzel, 2010). SEL programs go beyond just coping with challenges; they aim to promote a proactive approach to life and a sense of belonging (McAllister et al., 2017).

Teachers play a vital role in implementing SEL programs effectively. Research shows that teachers who themselves possess strong social and emotional skills can create a more supportive classroom environment and promote student motivation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011). By using positive communication and focusing on student strengths, teachers can help reduce negative behaviors (Voisin et al., 2005). Furthermore, developing teachers' SEL skills can improve their understanding of students and help them manage stress and burnout (Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Sandilos et al., 2020). Ultimately, a positive school climate built on strong social and emotional learning benefits both teachers and students (Cohen et al., 2009; Osher et al., 2016).

1.9. Key Concepts of the Doctoral Research

The following key concepts in this research work. The concepts have a cross-fertilizing effect with each other.

1.9.1. Personal Well-Being

Personal well-being is a complex concept encompassing subjective experiences, positive emotions, strong relationships, a sense of purpose, and achievement of goals (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). It is linked to mental health, self-esteem, and resilience, all of which contribute to an individual's ability to function effectively in work and life (Diener, 1985; Barry, 2013). Recent research even suggests a spiritual dimension to well-being, where individuals find meaning and purpose in a larger existence (Miri et al., 2023).

1.9.2. Professional Well-Being

Professional well-being, encompassing emotional well-being, motivation, and positive relationships, is crucial for educators (Warr, 1990; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It can be fostered through a positive classroom climate built on effective communication, positive discipline, and a caring teacher-student relationship (Yildirim, 2014; Cefai & Askell-Willians, 2017). Research suggests that promoting teacher well-being not only benefits their mental health but also improves student learning and behavior (Cefai & Askell-Willians, 2017; Miri et al., 2023).

1.9.3. Optimal Kindergarten Climate

An optimal kindergarten climate is a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment that fosters each child's development (Ministry of Education, 2020). It's built on three pillars: positive interactions between all participants, emotional responsiveness to activities, and strong relationships with parents (Ministry of Education, 2020). This includes teamwork among staff, clear boundaries for children, and a strong emotional presence from teachers (Ministry of Education, 2010). The teacher, as the leader, plays a key role in shaping this climate through their interactions with children, staff, and parents (Ministry of Education, 2023). However, research suggests that high stress levels among teachers can negatively impact the quality of these interactions and ultimately the classroom climate (Jennings et al., 2020).

1.9.4. Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from challenges and adversity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). It involves skills like emotional regulation, optimism, and problem-solving (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). These skills can be fostered in children through positive relationships with parents and teachers who themselves model resilience (Bîrneanu, 2014). Schools can also play a role by promoting social and emotional learning and creating a positive climate (Nolan et al., 2014). Building resilience in children early in life sets them up for better social and emotional well-being in the long run (Masten, 2014).

1.10. Conceptual framework

This doctoral research centers on a training program designed to improve KTs well-being and the kindergarten climate. The program draws on humanistic and educational theories, including positive psychology and social-emotional learning (SEL). It emphasizes both theoretical knowledge and practical application of tools for promoting well-being within the kindergarten setting.

The conceptual framework highlights the interconnectedness of personal well-being, professional well-being, kindergarten climate, and resilience. The training program itself is designed to improve all of these aspects through internal changes in the KTs, such as their approach to emotional and mental management, and their use of communication to build positive relationships. These changes are expected to have a positive ripple effect on the overall kindergarten environment.

Figure 1.1.

The Research's Conceptual Framework
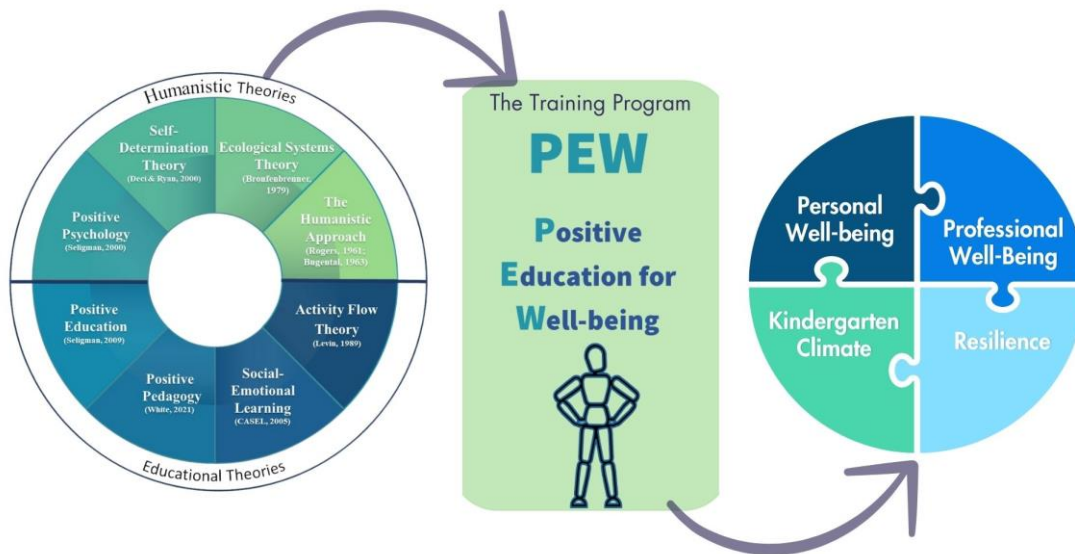
Note: Created by the author of the thesis.

2. Chapter II. Research Design and Methodology

2.1. Overview of the Research Design

The current doctoral research is comprised of the following studies:

Table 2.1.

A Detailed Research Design, the Process, and its Methodology

Study	Aim	Participants	Research question	Research hypothesis	Research tools	Data analysis
1	To examine the published papers from 2010 to 2023 (a decade of publications) to identify the definitions and measures of professional and personal well-being of the KTs.		What are the dimensions of KTs' well-being? What tools are most reliable and frequently used to assess the well-being dimensions of KTs? What programs /recommendations for fostering the well-being of KTs are found in the literature?		Systematic review method	Specific to the systematic review method.
2	To examine the impact of a positive education program (Positive Education for Well-being - "PEW") on the personal and professional well-being of the KTs before and	N=77 38 KTs in the experimental group and 39 KTs in the control group.	Will the PEW program affect KTs' personal and professional well-being? Will an improvement in the well-being of KTs be associated with an improvement in the perceptions of the kindergarten climate?	Significant improvements will be found for the KTs who will undergo the training program (the experimental group) in their personal and professional well-being in comparison to the KTs assigned to the control group.	The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999; Hebrew version) Satisfaction With Life Scale – (SWLS – Diener et al., 1985)	Statistical quantitative analysis of the questionnaires and comparison between and within groups

Study	Aim	Participants	Research question	Research hypothesis	Research tools	Data analysis
	after the training as well as their perception of the kindergarten's climate. Quantitative and Qualitative Study		Is there an impact of demographic characteristics on the well-being of KTs and the kindergarten climate? Will there be an improvement in the perception of KTs who undergo the training program regarding the kindergarten climate compared to the KTs in the control group?	A significant positive correlation would be found between the KTs' personal and professional well-being and their perception regarding the climate of the kindergarten in which they work, at both time points and in both study groups. A significant contribution of the KTs' demographic characteristics to the explained variance (EPV) of their personal and professional well-being at each time point, will be found.	Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (TSWQ). Renshaw et al. (2015) TALIS questionnaire for teachers – assessing the self-perceived stress level of teachers in the professional context	
3	An in-depth examination of the PEW training program's effects on the perception of the	N=11 KTs Participants in the training program.	Will the interviews reflect an impact of the PEW training program on the personal and professional well-being of KTs and the kindergarten climate?	Significant improvements will be found in the perceptions of the climate of the kindergarten climate in which the KT works.	In-depth interviews and reflective diaries	Qualitative analysis- content analysis of the answers to the

Study	Aim	Participants	Research question	Research hypothesis	Research tools	Data analysis
	personal and professional well-being of KTs and the kindergarten's climate Qualitative Study		Will the reflective diaries reflect an impact of the PEW training program on the personal and professional well-being of KTs and the kindergarten climate? What recommendations can be drawn from the results of the study?			interview questions and the reflective diaries.

2.2. Research Tools

2.2.1. Research tools for study 1

A systematic literature review was conducted to answer the research questions by analyzing relevant scholarly work published between 2012 and 2023 (Uman, 2011; Cooper, 1998). This method strengthens the research by incorporating the latest knowledge and identifying areas for further study (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The PRISMA method was used to ensure a transparent and thorough search process (Page et al., 2020). Keywords related to well-being, kindergarten teachers, and relevant tools (dimensions, programs, instruments, measures, recommendations) were used to search a comprehensive list of databases including APA PsycNet, Californian Journal of Health Promotion, EBSCO, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Springer Link, and Taylor & Francis Online (Royer & Moreau, 2016). This search aimed to capture a wide range of terms used for kindergarten teachers such as preschool teachers, early childhood educators, early age teachers, KTs, daycare teachers, interveners, and family childcare providers.

2.2.2. Research tools for study 2

The study used a variety of questionnaires to measure KTs' well-being. These questionnaires were chosen to provide a broad picture and avoid bias. Two questionnaires measured subjective happiness and life satisfaction using Likert scales (1-7 and 1-5 respectively). These questionnaires are widely used and well-validated (Subjective Happiness Scale - SHS, Satisfaction With Life Scale - SWLS). Another questionnaire assessed teacher well-being based on three factors: self-efficacy, positive affect, and positive relationships (Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire - TSWQ). Finally, sections of the TALIS international survey were used to measure kindergarten climate, work climate, stress level, and job satisfaction. This survey uses a 4-point Likert scale.

2.2.3. Research tools for study 3

The study used in-depth interviews and reflective diaries to collect data on how the training program impacted KTs. These methods aimed to understand the KTs' personal experiences and perspectives on the program and its impact. In-depth interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the program. These interviews

asked KTs about their experiences working as a teacher, their well-being, and their perceptions of the kindergarten climate. Following each training session, KTs completed reflective diaries. These diaries prompted them to reflect on their learnings, feelings, and how they planned to apply the training in the kindergarten.

2.2.4. Triangulation

This research employed triangulation, a method combining quantitative and qualitative data collection (surveys, interviews, diaries) to examine KTs' experiences from multiple perspectives (Burton & Obel, 2011). This approach strengthens the research by minimizing bias, increasing reliability, and offering a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study (Jick, 1979; Shkedi, 2011). Quantitative data can illuminate patterns in qualitative findings, while qualitative data can add depth and nuance to quantitative results (Fielding, 2012). Ultimately, triangulation enhances the credibility and comprehensiveness of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In this specific study, triangulation involved cross-checking the results from questionnaires with those from interview transcripts and reflective diaries.

2.3. The structure of the PEW training program

The program was held at a training center for educators and was delivered by the researcher over 30 academic hours during the school year. The structure was a 17-week training program with ten lessons, 135 minutes each (3 academic hours).

Table 2.2.

An Overview of the HBY Program Lessons, Goals, Activities, and Tasks

Lesson	Topics	Activity	Task
1	Introduction Positive Psychology What is it? Its place and contribution to the kindergarten.	Acquaintance Exercises of self-awareness to manage stress. Theories overview Quality of life "square"	Familiarity with the theories and their relevance to the KT and kindergarten.

Lesson	Topics	Activity	Task
2	Emotional self-awareness Emotional management and proactivity, emotional discourse in kindergarten.	Games to increase emotional awareness. Videos. Peer learning.	The KT will learn to recognize, identify, and manage emotions.
3	Ways to develop positive emotions such as: Joy, peace, hope, interest, admiration, gratitude, love, and more.	Familiarity with emotion management models. Analyze kindergarten situations.	The KTs will learn how to promote social-emotional discourse and introduce it as a way of life in kindergarten.
4	Optimism - The mechanisms of optimism, optimistic ways of thinking, and the importance of optimism.	A tool for managing thoughts.	KTs will learn how to identify mechanisms of optimism. KTs will be provided with tools for thinking management and promotion of positive and optimistic thinking.
5	Signature strengths according to Positive Psychology. Identifying strengths, sources of passion and flow, core values, and goals.	Inspirational videos. Strengths sharing board. Mutual support. Reading academic articles and writing insights.	KTs will recognize leading values in their lives. KTs will identify personal strengths. KTs will use their strengths to manage the kindergarten.
6	Empathy, giving, and helping others.	Volunteering. Simulation.	KTs will experiment with ways to develop values of empathy, giving, and helping in themselves and the children.
7	Effective, respectful, and empowering communication.	Listening exercises. Positive language exercises. Learning to promote positive feedback.	KTs will experience close communication and positive language.

Lesson	Topics	Activity	Task
		Keeping a Success Diary.	
8	The "Growth mindset" term. The "atomic habits" term.	Games and playing. Music. Teamwork. Goal setting and promoting habits.	The KTs will: Identify thinking patterns. Learn to identify children with different thinking patterns. Learn to promote developing thinking patterns in the kindergarten. Learn to identify promoting and inhibiting habits.
9	Integrating Positive Psychology into the annual curriculum.	Constructing a schematic work plan that combines the theories. Creating an activity folder.	Application and integration of the principles as a way of life and language in all study subjects throughout the year. KT will come up with ideas for activities.
10	The power of gratitude. Summary.	Awarding of personal medals. Mingling games for gratitude. Quality of life "square".	The importance of gratitude. Mutual gratitude. Summary of personal and professional progress.

2.4. Researcher's Role

This study investigates the design, implementation, and evaluation of a training program grounded in positive psychology principles. The program targets kindergarten teachers (KTs) with the aim of enhancing their well-being and fostering a more positive kindergarten climate. The researcher, drawing on over two decades of experience as a KT, plays a multifaceted role in this endeavor. Their background

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directly informs the program's development, as evidenced by their prior success in managing a kindergarten using positive education principles. Furthermore, the researcher acts as the program's architect, implementing it directly for the KTs. Finally, the researcher assumes the role of evaluator, conducting a three-part study to assess the program's efficacy. This multifaceted approach, combining practical experience with research expertise, strengthens the credibility of the investigation and offers valuable insights for improving kindergarten environments.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

This research prioritizes ethical principles to ensure participant well-being and research integrity. The researcher emphasizes informed consent, anonymity, and conflict of interest mitigation. Participants were chosen based on merit, not personal connections, and provided informed consent forms allowing for withdrawal (Belmont Report, 1979; Macfarlane, 2010). Anonymity was safeguarded through coded questionnaires, digital tools like Google Forms, and discreet interviews and diaries (Kaiser, 2009). To prevent bias from the program being part of a ministry-funded training initiative, the researcher ensured program independence and protected research results from undue influence ("International ethical guidelines," 2016). These ethical considerations establish a foundation for a trustworthy and responsible study.

3. Chapter III. Original Research Contribution

3.1. Study 1: Exploring Well-being Definitions and Measures for Kindergarten Teachers: A Systematic Literature Review

This section describes the systematic literature review, its objectives and research questions, methodology and findings, as well as the interpretations and conclusions.

3.1.1. Introduction

KTs play a vital role in early childhood education, and their well-being directly impacts the quality of education they provide (Royer & Moreau, 2016). Studies show that KTs with high personal well-being, characterized by low stress and emotional exhaustion, are better equipped to manage classrooms and create positive

relationships with children (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, KTs face challenges that can negatively affect their well-being, including emotional work, high workloads, and low social recognition (Kusma et al., 2012). To improve the quality of early childhood education, it is crucial to address these challenges by providing KTs with training and support for managing emotions and creating a supportive work environment (De Stasio et al., 2020).

3.1.2. Objective and Research Questions

The current study aims to examine through a systematic literature review the published research papers from 2012 to 2023 to identify definitions of well-being and measures for KTs and the recommendations associated with fostering these variables.

While searching for the primary dimensions and tools regarding the well-being of KTs, the following **study questions** were implemented:

1. What are the dimensions of the KTs' well-being?
2. What tools are most frequently used to assess KTs' well-being dimensions?
3. What programs/recommendations for fostering KTs' well-being are found in the literature?

3.1.3. Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted following Uman's (2011) guidelines to analyze studies on KTs well-being published between 2012 and 2023 in peer-reviewed journals. The search encompassed a wide range of databases including APA PsycNet, Californian Journal of Health Promotion, Conference Abstract Book, EBSCO, ELSEVIER, ERIC, Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, Frontiers, HELDA Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Ingenta Connect, KÉPZÉS ÉS GYAKORLAT, Leena and Luna International, Chikusei, Japan, Sabinet, SAGA Journals, ScienceDirect ELSEVIER, Springer Link, and Taylor & Francis Online. To capture the various terms for KTs, the search incorporated keywords like early age teachers, daycare teachers, interveners, and family childcare providers (Royer & Moreau, 2016) alongside the core term "KT". Additionally, keywords encompassing the concept of well-being, such as dimensions, instruments, programs,

recommendations, tools, and measures, were included. Studies were restricted to those published in English with full text access and addressing the research questions.

3.1.4. Findings

The systematic literature review identified over 10,000 articles on KTs well-being. After applying filters for publication dates (2012-2023), English language, full text access, and focus on preschool teachers (excluding general teachers, daycare outside preschool context, nannies, and mixed populations), 32 articles remained. Further screening removed articles on special education (1), student populations (1), manager-KT relationships (1), personal well-being factors (1), and emotional intelligence/burnout (1). This resulted in a final selection of 11 articles directly relevant to the research question of the systematic literature review.

The review identified three main categories of well-being dimensions: social aspects (empathy, communication, support systems), emotional and personality aspects (emotional intelligence, self-management), and burnout-related aspects (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, lack of fulfillment). Studies primarily used quantitative questionnaires and surveys for assessment, with some incorporating physiological indicators like cortisol levels. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was a frequently used tool.

Interestingly, the review found limited recommendations within the existing literature. Most studies focused on identifying factors impacting well-being, but the conclusions offered implicit suggestions for improvement. These included providing KTs with tools to manage stress and mistakes, strengthening their self-confidence through better working conditions and support systems, and fostering positive work environments through training and professional development programs.

A key limitation identified was the lack of clear and actionable plans for implementing these improvements in KTs' well-being. Additionally, none of the reviewed studies employed qualitative research methods.

3.1.5. Discussion

This systematic literature review examined studies on KTs well-being in early childhood education. The review identified three main categories of well-being dimensions (emotional, social, burnout) and various assessment tools (questionnaires, physiological measures). However, limited recommendations for improvement were found. Most studies focused on identifying factors impacting well-being, but conclusions offered implicit suggestions like providing KTs with stress management tools and fostering positive work environments. Additionally, the review highlighted the importance of international collaboration in academic research and the value of research conducted in different global locations. The geographical distribution of the studies did not include all regions, suggesting a need for further investigation.

The review also emphasized challenges in comparing studies due to the use of diverse research tools and the multiplicity of dimensions investigated. To address this, the authors categorized dimensions into three main areas and pointed to the need for standardized tools and clear plans to implement well-being improvements.

3.1.6. Conclusions

Study 1 highlighted the need for increased investment in this under-researched area. The review identified three main categories of well-being dimensions (personal, social, burnout) but found limited standardized tools for assessment and recommendations for improvement. While existing studies suggest self-management tools, positive work environments, and emotional support as potential solutions, further research is needed to develop clear plans for fostering KTs' well-being and improve the quality of preschool education globally.

3.2. Study 2: Examination of the Impact of a Positive Education Program on Kindergarten Teachers' Personal and Professional Well-Being and Their Perception of the Kindergarten's Climate

This section describes study 2 (the quantitative study), its objectives and research questions, participants, tools, findings and conclusions.

3.2.1. Introduction

This doctoral thesis investigates the well-being of KTs. The first study identified a lack of training programs designed to improve KTs' well-being and resilience. To address this gap, the second study examines the impact of a new training program (PEW) on KTs' well-being and kindergarten climate using quantitative methods.

3.2.2. Objective and Research Questions

This research examines the PEW training program's impact on KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate they work in. The study compares a group that receives the training (experimental) to a control group that doesn't.

The main goals are to see if the PEW training program improves KTs' personal and professional well-being, the kindergarten climate, and to analyze if KTs' characteristics influence these aspects. Specific questions address these goals:

- Does the training program lead to differences in personal and professional well-being and kindergarten climate perception between the two groups?
- Do KTs' characteristics play a role in their well-being and climate perception?

The researcher believes KTs who receive the training will have higher well-being and perceive a more positive climate. The researcher also hypothesize that KTs' characteristics will influence the program's impact. This part of the study uses quantitative data analysis to assess these questions and hypotheses.

3.2.3. Participants

This study included 77 female kindergarten teachers (KTs) aged 24-63 to participate in a training program designed to improve their well-being. The KTs were randomly assigned to either a training group (38) or a control group (39) that only answered questionnaires. While some baseline differences emerged in country of birth and residential area (with slightly more KTs born outside Israel and living in cities in the training group), there were no significant differences between the groups

in job responsibilities, children's ages, teacher qualifications, age, seniority, or number of children in their classes.

3.2.4. Research Tools

This study used four questionnaires to assess the personal and professional well-being and kindergarten climate at two time points: before and after the PEW training program.

- Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS): This 4-item survey measures general happiness. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha was high $\alpha = .75$.
- Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): This 5-item survey measures overall life satisfaction. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha was high $\alpha = .81$.
- Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (TSWQ): This 8-item survey measures teacher well-being in two areas: School Connectedness (The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha was high $\alpha = .77$) and Teaching Efficacy (The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha was high $\alpha = .76$).
- TALIS questionnaire for teachers: This questionnaire, adapted for Israel, measures kindergarten climate and job satisfaction. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha for the 14 items of the KT stress level questionnaire was high $\alpha = .87$. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha for the 13 items of the KT satisfaction level questionnaire was high $\alpha = .77$.

3.2.5. Findings

This study investigated the impact of the PEW training program on KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate. The researcher compared a group of teachers who received the training to a control group who did not.

Before the PEW training program, there were no significant differences between the groups in terms of personal and professional well-being or kindergarten climate. After the PEW training program, however, KTs in the experimental group reported significant improvements in several areas. These KTs reported feeling

happier, more satisfied with life, more connected to their school, and more confident in their teaching abilities compared to the control group. The PEW training program also appears to have helped them manage stress in the workplace. Interestingly, KTs who were not kindergarten managers and resided in cities showed a greater improvement in some aspects of well-being.

Table 3.1.

Mean, SD, and F-Values of the KTs' Personal and Professional Well-Being and their Kindergarten Climate by Group and Time (N = 77, df = 75)

	T1		T2			F-values - ANCOVA		
	M	SD	M	SD	M.E[1]	F	p	η_p^2
Stress level								
SHS	5.60	0.90	5.37	0.86	5.35			
	5.50	0.83	5.82	0.82	5.85	9.82**	.002	.12
SWLS	5.51	0.82	5.30	0.97	5.21			
	5.12	0.96	5.57	0.69	5.66	6.97**	.010	.09
Professional well-being – TSWQ								
SCS	3.21	0.53	3.16	0.60	3.13			
	2.99	0.74	3.45	0.47	3.48	8.38**	.005	.10
TES	3.47	0.45	3.38	0.54	3.33			
	3.28	0.37	3.63	0.37	3.68	10.78**	.002	.13
Kindergarten climate								
Stress level	3.01	0.72	3.11	0.57	3.12			
	3.06	0.46	2.83	0.59	2.82	6.14*	.016	.08
Satisfaction level	3.01	0.39	3.05	0.39	3.04			
	2.88	0.32	3.06	0.29	3.07	.17	.677	.00

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$; [1]M.E = Mean Estimated

Overall, the study suggests that the PEW training program can be a beneficial tool for improving KTs' personal and professional well-being and potentially creating a more positive kindergarten climate. The PEW training program had a moderate to high effect size for various personal and professional well-being measures, indicating a meaningful impact.

3.2.6. Discussion

The PEW training program showed promise in improving both KTs personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate. Compared to a control group, KTs who participated in the PEW training program reported significant improvements in personal and professional well-being, including increased happiness and job satisfaction, and decreased stress (Ergas & Avisar, 2022). This aligns with theories of positive psychology and social-emotional learning, which emphasize the importance of self-awareness and interpersonal skills for building resilience (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The program also appears to have contributed to a more positive kindergarten climate, potentially by reducing KTs stress, a factor linked to improved classroom environments (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014).

Interestingly, the PEW training program had a stronger impact on KTs who were not in kindergarten management roles (supplementary KTs). This might be due to several factors. Supplementary KTs may experience a lower sense of belonging within the kindergarten community and receive less social recognition for their work compared to managing KTs (Korczyński, 2018). The PEW training program, by fostering a sense of connection within the training group, may have addressed this need for belongingness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Additionally, the program's content may have provided supplementary KTs with a greater sense of meaning in their work, further contributing to their well-being (Reeve & Assor, 2011). This highlights the potential of the PEW training programs to not only improve KTs well-being but also create a more positive learning environment for students, particularly when considering the specific needs of different KT roles within a kindergarten setting.

3.2.7. Conclusions

The study concluded that the PEW training program significantly improved KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate. The program enhanced KTs' sense of competence, belonging, and overall well-being, while also improving their teaching skills and relationships. It equipped them with tools to be successful educators. Additionally, the program contributed to a more positive learning environment by reducing KT stress and increasing job satisfaction. Interestingly, while demographics didn't significantly affect the overall results, the

program had a stronger positive impact on KTs who weren't in kindergarten management roles.

3.3. Study 3: In-depth Qualitative Examination of the Training Program's Effects on the Perception of the Personal and Professional Well-being of KTs and the Kindergarten's Climate

This section describes study 3 (the qualitative study), its objectives and questions, participants, tools, findings, and conclusions.

3.3.1. Introduction

This qualitative study explored the experiences of KTs who participated in the PEW training program. The researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how the program impacted the KTs, following up on the quantitative findings from a previous study. The training focused on self-awareness, emotional management, and managing stressful situations, all crucial factors for KT personal and professional well-being according to previous research (Ryff, 1989; Jennings, 2015; Roberts et al., 2016). The program also aimed to create a positive kindergarten climate through improved relationships and communication (Oz, n.d.; Israeli Ministry of Education, 2017), ultimately reducing stress and burnout among KTs (Sandilos et al., 2018). By fostering a supportive community where KTs could share experiences, the program aimed to enhance both personal and professional well-being for KTs and create a more positive learning environment for children.

3.3.2. Objective and Research Questions

This study focused on the PEW training program for KTs. It aimed to understand how the program impacted KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate, ultimately generating recommendations for improvement in both areas.

Study Questions

1. What is the impact of the PEW training program on the personal and professional well-being of KTs and the kindergarten climate?
2. What recommendations can be drawn from the results of the study?

3.3.3. Participants

The study participants were 23 KTs working in Israeli Ministry of Education kindergartens. All were women between 32 and 55 years old, with most born in Israel. They all worked full-time with experience ranging from 7 to 31 years. Ten KTs worked in regular kindergartens, while one was in special education. There was a mix of management roles: nine managed autonomous kindergartens with both administrative and pedagogical responsibilities, one managed a junior division kindergarten within a school system, and another acted as a substitute manager. Educational backgrounds included both bachelor's and master's degrees in education.

The interviews occurred at two key points: during the week after the first training program meeting (T1) and another week after the last meeting (T2). This timeline allowed the researcher to capture the KTs' initial impressions and longer-term reflections on the program's impact.

3.3.4. Study Tools

This study explored the impact of the PEW training program on KTs through interviews and reflective diaries. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the program. The initial interviews focused on the KTs' general experiences, personal and professional well-being, and perception of the kindergarten climate. After the program, interviews delved deeper, including questions about the program's impact. Both sets of interviews were conducted by phone to ensure privacy and convenience for participants. Additionally, KTs filled out reflective diaries after each training session, capturing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the program content. The researcher then analyzed data from both interviews and diaries, focusing on a specific group of KTs chosen for in-depth analysis.

3.3.5. Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the rich data from interview transcripts and reflective diaries. This approach focuses on identifying recurring themes within the content, aiming to understand the interviewees' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values (Shkedi, 2003). Thematic analysis prioritizes the meaning of

what's said over how it's said. Following Shkedi (2011), the analysis involved systematically examining and interpreting the data to uncover its significance. The researcher identified key themes from the transcripts and diaries, then divided them into sub-categories based on relevance to the study's goals. This process aimed to reveal connections and interactions between these themes, ultimately creating a broader understanding of the program's impact.

3.3.6. Findings

The content analysis of the interviews and reflective diaries revealed five themes as presented in figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1.

Themes from the Interviews and Reflective Diaries Analysis
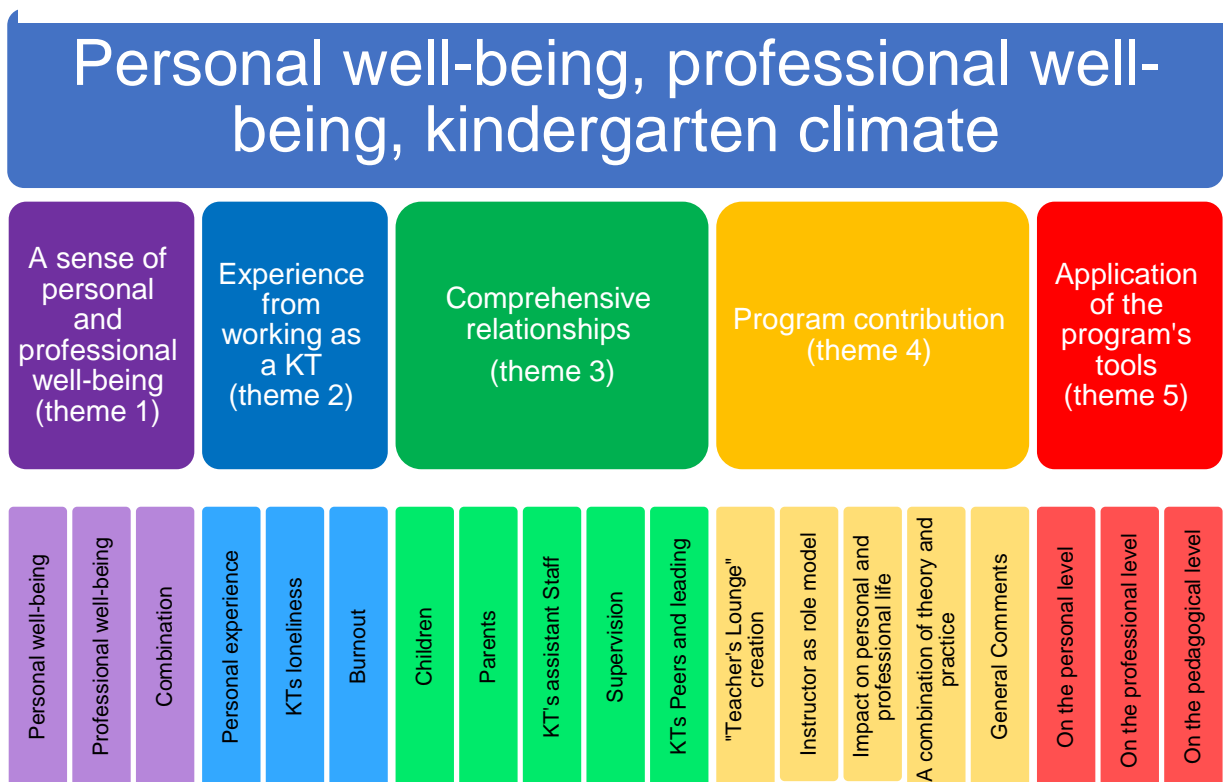
The name selected for the training program was "Happiness in Kindergarten Begins with You." The name of the programs expresses the link between KTs' personal and professional well-being, as perceived by them. The name resonated with KTs, who recognized the interconnectedness between their personal well-being -

encompassing happiness, calmness and meaning - and the climate they create professionally in the kindergarten setting.

Theme 1 - The Feeling of Well-being on a Personal and Professional Level

The KTs discussed their intertwined personal and professional well-being. Personal well-being included life satisfaction, family, gratitude, and quality of life. Professional well-being centered on belonging, job satisfaction from working with children, personal expression, competence, and self-esteem. Appreciation from parents/supervisors boosted well-being, while lack of appreciation caused burnout. Some separated personal/professional lives, but often one domain impacted the other. The KTs recognized the training provided tools to promote overall well-being across both personal and professional realms.

Theme 2 - Experience of Working as a Kindergarten Teacher

KTs experience a rollercoaster of emotions. They love and find purpose in nurturing young minds, but the system throws wrenches in their passion. Bureaucratic burdens, a lack of resources, and pressure to meet external demands steal time from what they love - teaching. This isolation, coupled with a sense that their needs go unheard, leads to burnout. While they find joy in their students, the system's challenges create significant burdens

Theme 3 - Comprehensive Relationships

The work of KTs includes many relationships; it is affected by them and influences them. The analysis of the interviews regarding the working relationships of KTs suggests that KTs are surrounded by various circles of relationships. At times, these relationships support and strengthen the KT's sense of well-being, these includes the circle of leading KTs and the circle of the kindergarten children. However, most relationships were found to be accompanied by challenging feelings, these include the circle of dealing with challenging children, the circle of parents, the circle of supervision, and peer KTs.

Theme 4 - The Program's Contribution to KTs

The contribution of the PEW training program to the KTs can be viewed from several perspectives on both a personal and a professional level. This was evident in terms of the sitting, the creation of the community, and the safe space that encourages and promotes discourse. Moreover, the role modeling of the instructor to the KTs was experienced both at the level of organization and formation of the group, as well as in the personal relationship and communication management expressed throughout the meetings. The structured and experiential learning method also affected the atmosphere and amplified the contribution of the program. The KTs noted the effect of these contributions on their personal and professional well-being as well as on the climate in their kindergarten.

Theme 5 - Application of the Tools Acquired During the Program

This theme aims to understand which of the tools that were acquired in the program were applied by the KT. It seems that the PEW training program contributed significantly to the personal conduct of the KTs and was also reflected in the application of the tools on the personal level. At the same time, the application of the tools on the professional and pedagogical levels with the children in the kindergarten was carried out in a less encompassing manner. The tools remained at the kindergarten level, and only a few were transferred to the children's level. As a result, the KTs requested to receive additional training to be able to apply the tools more broadly at the children's level.

3.3.7. Discussion

The PEW training program was found to have a positive impact on both the personal and professional well-being of Kindergarten Teachers (KTs) and the overall climate of the kindergarten. KTs reported feeling calmer and more confident after the program, which helped them manage stress and improve relationships with children, parents, and colleagues. The program also addressed the feeling of isolation reported by some KTs by creating a support group atmosphere. Overall, the PEW training program appears to be an effective tool for improving the well-being of KTs and the kindergarten environment.

3.3.8. Conclusions

A deeper analysis of the PEW training program for KTs showed it benefited KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten environment. The program fostered calmness, confidence, and communication skills, which improved relationships with children, parents, and colleagues. It also helped KTs manage stress and connect with peers but couldn't address external factors like workload.

3.4. Triangulation of the Qualitative and Quantitative Data

This research used mixed methods to examine the impact of the PEW training program on KTs. The findings showed the program improved KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate. KTs reported feeling calmer, more confident, and having better relationships with children, parents, and colleagues. The program also helped them manage stress and connect with peers. However, it did not address external factors like workload. Overall, the PEW program appears to be a valuable tool for creating a more positive and supportive environment for both teachers and children in kindergartens.

Some interesting details emerged from the qualitative data (interviews and diaries) that the quantitative data (surveys) could not capture. For instance, the qualitative data highlighted feelings of loneliness among KTs, which the program helped to alleviate by creating a support group atmosphere. The qualitative data also shed light on the complex relationships KTs have with children, parents, and assistants. While the training improved some of these relationships, like the one with the assistant, others, like the one with parents, require further investigation.

4. Chapter IV: Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

In accordance with the studies' findings and their discussion, this chapter will present the general conclusions of the doctoral research, its limitations, implications and recommendations for further research.

4.1. Main Conclusions

This research examined how the PEW training program impacted KTs in accordance with the research questions. Overall, the PEW training program improved KTs' personal and professional well-being and the kindergarten climate. KTs reported feeling calmer, more confident and having better relationships with all aspects of their work. The program also helped them manage stress and connect with peers.

The research identified several key findings. First, investing in KTs' personal and professional well-being is crucial for improving early childhood education. Second, the PEW training program addressed personal aspects (calmness, confidence), social aspects (communication, belonging), and burnout (stress management). Interestingly, KTs who didn't manage kindergartens saw a greater improvement, possibly due to the additional pressure of those roles.

The qualitative data (interviews and diaries) provided deeper insights. The program helped alleviate loneliness by creating a support group atmosphere. It also shed light on complex relationships with assistants and parents. While the program improved some relationships, like the one with the assistant, others require further investigation. Finally, the research showed the PEW training program creates a more positive and inclusive environment for both KTs and children in kindergartens.

4.2. Implications

Theoretical Implications

KTs face demanding jobs with emotional stress, loneliness, and the challenges of working with young children. This research highlights the importance of promoting KT well-being, which can improve their feelings, perceptions, and even create a more positive learning environment for the children.

The study explored the PEW training program that used positive psychology and pedagogy to equip KTs with coping tools. This approach increased their understanding of their role in shaping the kindergarten climate and empowered them to manage relationships, self-awareness, confidence, and resilience.

Pedagogical Implications

The training program and its tools can be implemented as part of KTs' training programs for professional development in different cultures and countries.

Methodological Implications

The interviews and reflective diaries constituted a significant methodological tool that allowed the KTs to express dilemmas, difficulties, and feelings without the direction of the researcher, thus contributing to the triangulation of the findings of the questionnaires and those qualitative findings.

Practical Implications

The training program combines tools and practices from several theories and fields, which can be used in daily life. The research findings show that the training program contributed to the personal and professional well-being of the KTs, especially to the sense of belonging, the perception of the role, and the improvement of the kindergarten climate. The combination of tools and experiences, based on a deep understanding of theories from the humanistic and educational fields, contributed to the ability to implement these tools in everyday life and not just in kindergarten. Implementing the program in additional kindergartens can contribute to raising the status of KTs and preventing burnout.

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