

LEADERSHIP IN A PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN CREATING A POSITIVE CLIMATE

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the opinions of preschool educational institution principals on the role of leadership in fostering a positive school climate. During the qualitative research, which involved semi-structured interviews with eight principals, it was found that mutual cooperation with the community, active participation in joint activities, and shared responsibility and decision-making, promote teamwork and create emotional security and a positive school climate. The research also found that preschool educational institution principals must constantly develop and improve their leadership skills, creating mutual relationships, trust, open communication and common agreements in the institution. The research revealed that a clear institutional structure and a safe and inclusive environment directly impact the school community's ability to foster a positive climate. Leadership qualities such as respect, openness and shared responsibility encourage the school community to engage in activities that foster a positive school climate. The principals recognise unanimously that leadership is not a spontaneous process; it is cultivated by the entire school community, through collaborative initiatives and teacher involvement in decision-making processes, as well as by fostering a positive climate in the preschool educational institution.

KEY WORDS: *leadership, preschool educational institution, role of the principal, positive climate.*

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Introduction

Strategic documents (The Good School Concept, 2015; Guidelines for Strengthening Leadership and Management in Educational Institutions, 2020; State Progress Strategy 'Lithuania 2050', 2024) and the works of researchers (Kirby, Douglass, Lyskawa, 2021; Chkheidze, 2023; Angtud, Groenewald, Kilag et al., 2023) highlight the importance of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in an educational institution. 'The Good School Concept' (2015) notes that clear, inspiring and unifying leadership enables members of the educational institution's community to take the initiative, assume responsibility, boldly take risks, make decisions and consistently implement them. Research by L. Miltenienė, J. Valuckienė, M. Damkuvienė et al. (2022), N. A. A. Angtud et al. (2023) and S. Chkheidze (2023) has found that a principal's leadership promotes the personal growth of employees, helps to foster fundamental humanistic values, successfully mobilises a community, creates a positive climate, and motivates members of an educational institution to take responsibility for improving the quality of the education.

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A positive school climate is a multifaceted concept, understood as the overall emotional, social and psychological work environment, in which employees feel safe, interact, collaborate and work towards common goals (Angtud et al., 2023; Kilag, Diano, Malbas et al., 2023). O. Al Kurdi, R. El-Haddadeh and T. Eldabi (2020) identify key factors that determine an organisation's climate, which are: *the organisational structure*, i.e. the system that establishes formal relationships and defines responsibilities; *ongoing processes*, i.e. communication, motivation, decision-making, leadership; *the physical environment*, i.e. dynamic, open, functional; and *the values and norms* that guide the organisation. M. Rožman and T. Štrukelj (2020) state that an organisation's creation of a positive climate consists of *employee relationships, commitments, job satisfaction, motivation and leadership*. J. Barriá-González, Á. Postigo, R. Pérez-Luco et al. (2021) highlight the following components of the climate: *human relationships* – autonomy and active engagement; *trust in the organisation and its leaders*; *social support and encouragement* – employees who feel supported and encouraged by their leaders perform their duties better; *motivation*; *job satisfaction* (see Fig. 1).

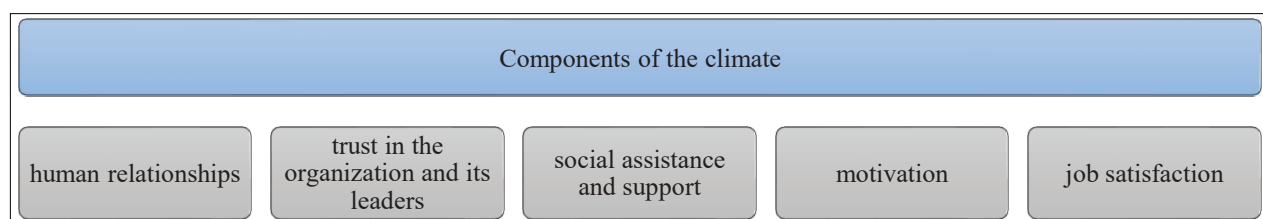


Figure 1. Components of the climate

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026), based on J. Barriá-González et al. (2021).

Leadership as a phenomenon was first examined in ancient times in the works of Plato, Caesar, Plutarch and other thinkers. However, systematic scientific research on leadership did not begin until the mid-20th century. Recently, leadership has come to be distinguished from mere management; it is associated with the ability to set the direction of activity, inspire people to work harmoniously towards common goals, and initiate meaningful change (Bwalya, 2023). According to D. Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė and V. Strazdauskienė (2023), a leader is a person whose personal qualities and abilities naturally encourage others to follow them. According to R. Braslauskienė and A. Norvilienė (2021), leadership manifests itself *in the ability to gain people's trust and support for the organisation's goals, to inspire people to act voluntarily through personal example, and to motivate people*. The essence of leadership is to *bring people together, unite them, and encourage them to engage in specific activities to achieve common goals*. Thus, when discussing management in the context of leadership, it can be stated that a principal cannot be appointed as a leader; individuals may hold managerial positions, but it is a question whether they will become leaders (Braslauskienė, Norvilienė, 2021).

According to the 'Guidelines for Strengthening Leadership and Management in Educational Institutions' (2020), educational leaders are assigned many roles. A leader must be able to mobilise the community, empower its members to act voluntarily, and foster relationships based on respect, trust and cooperation. Therefore, the principal must use a leadership style that affects the performance, motivation, and the emotional and psychological state of the employees. Scholars distinguish between classic and contemporary leadership styles. The group of classic leadership styles includes *authoritarian, democratic and liberal* styles, which are usually attributed to behavioural theories. The group of contemporary leadership styles includes *transactional, transformational and passive* styles, which are usually based on relational theories (Sabbah, Ibrahim, Khamis et al., 2020; Wu, Awang, Ahmad et al., 2024). This article analyses in detail the contemporary group of leadership styles, the characteristics of which are presented in Table 1. All leadership styles have both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, their application must correspond to the specifics of the institution's activities, the goals set, the level of employee competence, the organisational culture, the vision, etc (Timofejevaite, Šilingiene, 2025).

Table 1. Leadership styles and their characteristics.

Leadership style	Leadership style characteristics
Transformational	A leader using his charisma encourages employees to boldly accept challenges, solve problems, exceed expected requirements and goals, and strive for personal and professional growth. Transformational leadership style helps strengthen employees' internal motivation to implement changes
Transactional	The leader bases his influence on constant mutual exchange, and applies a system of rewards and discipline. The transactional leadership style enables team members to understand clearly expectations, and focus on the proper performance of tasks and goal achievement
Passive	The leader gives employees unlimited freedom to act independently, transfers responsibility to employees, and participates passively in the management of the organisation

Source: compiled by the authors (2026), based on A. R. Bwalya (2023), and A. Timofejevaite and V. Šilingiene (2025).

'The Good School Concept' (2015) emphasises that in a school that is good for everyone, leadership and management must be empowering. They are characterised by the following features: *a clear, unifying, inspiring vision; a culture of dialogue and agreement* (participation of all members of the school community in decision-making); *shared leadership* (based on trust, encouraging taking an initiative and assuming responsibility); *effective administration; creativity and the will to act*. N. A. A. Angtud et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of servant leadership in creating a positive climate in the institution. This leadership philosophy is based on prioritising the needs of other people. Servant leadership helps to create a positive climate, by creating an inclusive, supportive environment that ensures the well-being of all members of the school community. Research by A. Canavesi and E. Minelli (2021) has identified significant correlations between servant leadership and teacher job satisfaction. R. Braslauskienė and A. Norvilienė (2021) reveal that it is difficult to find a leader whose leadership can be attributed to one or another of the discussed styles. Leadership usually manifests itself by integrating separate styles, the choice of which also depends on the situation. Also, the personality and individual attitudes of the leader are of fundamental importance when choosing a leadership style.

Researchers have recently been examining leadership from various perspectives. L. Beattie (2021) analysed the concept of leadership and emerging leadership trends. P. Cabrera-Murcia (2021), and J. Ahn, A. J. Bowers and A. D. Welton (2021) examined the expression of leadership in educational institutions. S. Setia, P. Leng, yrs E. Muliatie et al. (2021), and E. Abson, P. Schofield, J. Kennell et al. (2024) actualised the importance of leadership and the role of leaders in creating an educational institution where everyone can feel good. A. Canavesi and E. Minelli (2021), O. K. T. Kilag et al. (2023) and K. Badura and J. Crews (2025) examined different leadership styles and their impact on the organisation. R. Želvys, A. Zabardast, S. Nemati et al. (2019), O. Al Kurdi, R. El-Haddadeh and T. Eldabib (2020), N. A. A. Angtud et al. (2023), and J. Velečić, E. Price and R. Olsen (2023) emphasised the importance of leadership in creating a positive climate in the organisation. Foreign and Lithuanian scientists (Rožman, Štrukelj, 2020; Butvilas, Janiukštis, Bubnys et al., 2023; Kumar, Goel, 2024; Yiming, Yan, Jinsheng, 2024; Sun, Liu, Liu et al., 2024) described features of creating a positive microclimate, everyday relationships and communication styles in a classroom.

Despite the growing attention to the topic of educational leadership, scientific research on the role of the principal in creating a positive climate in a preschool is still fragmented. Therefore, the problem question is raised: what is the role of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution?

The object of the research is the role of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution.

The aim of the research is to reveal the role of a principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution.

Theoretical (analysis of scientific literature and documents) and *empirical* (partially structured interviews, content analysis) research methods were applied.

1. Research organisation

In order to clarify the expression of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution, a qualitative research strategy was chosen (Creswell, 2018; Žydzūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017). According to K. Kardelis (2016), qualitative research encompasses the study of an object, which aims to understand the behaviour and sensations of a person, such as physical, social and psychological environmental influences. Such data about subjects are collected in their natural environment. The main idea in qualitative research is the context: the social, physical and material environment in which certain activities by individuals take place. In addition, qualitative research does not raise hypotheses, it is characterised by flexibility, which means that such research is unstructured (Creswell, 2018). The collected qualitative research data reveal processes, experiences and meanings instead of statistics (Žydzūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017), and allow the researcher to reveal the experiences of the research participants and interpret them (Bitinas, 2013). The aim of this research was to obtain the most detailed and open responses possible in order to achieve the aims of the qualitative research.

The research is constructed based on scientific literature, document analysis, social constructivist (Berger, Luckmann, 1999) and symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 1998) theoretical approaches, according to which social reality is formed when people constantly communicate, share experiences, create common ideas, and seek to apply those ideas through communication with each other. Therefore, the principal's stories about creating a positive climate by assuming leadership are treated not as reports of 'objective facts', but as a construction of meanings, highlighting how participants perceive, name and justify the expression of leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution.

Participants in the research. Eight principals of preschool educational institutions in the city of Klaipėda (aged 41 to 62) participated in the research. Non-probability purposive sampling was chosen for this research (Patton, 2002). The most important selection criterion was: at least five years of work experience in managing a preschool educational institution. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the informants.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the informants

Code	Gender	City	Position	Management experience
V1	Female	Klaipėda	Principal	10 yrs
V2			Deputy principal	5 yrs
V3			Deputy principal	19 yrs
V4			Principal	7 yrs
V5			Principal	10 yrs
V6			Principal	13 yrs
V7			Principal	20 yrs
V8			Principal	7 yrs

Source: compiled by the authors (2026).

The research was conducted in October and December 2025. A semi-structured interview instrument was prepared to collect research data, which consisted of six main questions about how principals understand the expression of leadership (How does leadership manifest itself in your institution?), about the most important abilities or qualities of a principal for the implementation of leadership (What abilities/qualities of a principal

are most important for the implementation of leadership?), about the role of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate (Does a clear structure of the institution influence the role of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate? Does a safe and inclusive environment influence the role of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate?), about factors that influence the creation of a positive climate (What factors determine a positive climate in your institution?), and about suggestions on how to improve the role of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution (How do you propose to improve the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution?).

Participants were sent a consent form, which provided information about the organisation of the research, including the purpose, process, confidentiality, duration, etc. After receiving the signed consent forms, the time of the research was agreed with each participant. The interview was conducted in person, with direct communication between the participant and the researcher. The interview lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. Informants were coded by assigning each a letter and number code: V1 to V8. The research data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Each transcribed text was read by both researchers. The text was read in order to form an overall picture, emphasising the main sentences or parts of sentences that are important for the analysed topic. The text was divided into units of meaning, represented by phrases, sentences and keywords directly related to the phenomenon under research.

Qualitative content analysis was applied when processing the obtained research data. As a data analysis method, qualitative content analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the object and its context (Bitinas, Rupšienė, Žydžiūnaitė, 2008). V. Žydžiūnaitė and S. Sabaliauskas (2017) describe qualitative content analysis as the systematically analysed content of text documents, which aims to identify the relationships between texts and meaning properties, and analyse them in the selected research field. According to V. Žydžiūnaitė (2012), qualitative content analysis includes: reading the text many times; isolating categories based on 'keywords'; dividing the content of categories into subcategories; and interpreting and justifying categories and subcategories from the text (Gaižauskaitė, Valavičienė, 2016).

The interview was conducted in accordance with the principles of ethical research: good faith, respect for the dignity of the person, the right to receive accurate information, and honesty, obtaining the consent of the research participants (Gaižauskaitė, Valavičienė, 2016; Žydžiūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017). As stated by M. Hennink, I. Hutter and A. Bailey (2020), the ethical principles in qualitative research remain the same as in other types of research, but qualitative research can be more complex. Qualitative research creates a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the informant. Ethical principles must be observed not only during the interview, but also after it, because the identity of the informant cannot be revealed, even after the interview, and the results of the research must be presented correctly (Gaižauskaitė, Valavičienė, 2016). None of the above ethical principles were violated during the research, and no misunderstandings arose.

2. Findings of the research

The role of leadership in an educational institution is understood as the totality of the principal's behaviour, decisions and interpersonal interactions that determine the activities, relationships and overall results of the organisation's members (Kirby et al., 2021). During the research, it was relevant to find out *how leadership manifests itself in the educational institution led by the informants*. The study data are presented in Table 3.

Summarising the data presented in Table 3, it can be stated that *leadership in preschool educational institutions is most evident through various working groups where employees are involved in joint activities, projects and organised events; by applying appropriate conditions, leadership is consistently developed by strengthening employees' trust*.

Table 3. The principals' opinions on the role of leadership in the institution

Category	Subcategory	Excerpts from interview texts
Role of leadership in the institution	Leadership development and conditions	<i>When I came to work here, there really was none [...] there was none [...] leadership cannot exist if there are no conditions for it [...] circumstances must be created for teamwork to manifest (V1). There was no leadership when I came to work [...] we developed it [...] people were afraid of making mistakes [...] conditions and trust were needed (V2)</i>
	Leadership in work groups	<i>We established [...] working groups [...] in order to have conditions for teamwork to manifest itself [...] teams need to be formed (V5). We made working groups [...] we re-elect them every year [...] then there is a leader in that working group (V8). Leadership is promoted through working together in working groups, group teams, communities and project activities (V7). Manifests itself in working groups, organising events (V6)</i>
	Leadership at different departments	<i>Leadership is manifested in administration when the principal mobilises the administration to perform tasks [...] it is also manifested at the level of educators [...] at several levels, and even at the level of employees... (V4)</i>

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026), based on interview data.

The research findings highlight the following *abilities and qualities of principals that are most important for the implementation of leadership* (research data presented in Table 4):

Ability to unite a team: *the principal must be able to bring together a team [...] goals must be clear (V1); assign tasks to people (V2).*

Ability to motivate: *to maintain [...] motivation, [...] spirit (V7); ability to motivate (V5).*

Ability to communicate and build connection: *only communication and connection will create team growth (V3); when communicating, listening [...] must see everyone (V8).*

The ability to involve community members in decision-making: *convincing those people [...] that we are sitting in the same boat and paddling in the same direction (V6).*

Ability to delegate and distribute responsibilities: *selecting people for a certain team (V1); recognising their leadership qualities [...] by allowing them in practice to try out that position as a leader (V4).*

Ability to work collaboratively: *to act together [...] to be able to act together [...] to be close to your people (V3).*

The ability to hear everyone: *the most important thing is to hear every [...] person (V2).*

Principal's *qualities* in implementing leadership:

Honesty and fairness: *I have to be a fair leader (V1); to be honest with myself and others (V3).*

Predictability: *I have to be predictable (V5).*

Strength and calmness: *I will not be strong in my thoughts, I will not be calm [...] anxiety is transmitted (V8).*

Openness to change: *being open to change itself (V7).*

Moral and ethical qualities: *basic politeness, adherence to ethics (V2).*

Humanity and respect for employees: *employees must feel safe with their principals [...] so that I can protect them (V4).*

During the research, all the principals emphasised *the ability to unite a team, motivate, communicate, build relationships as well as delegate and distribute responsibilities*. According to the research by A. Baravykaitė-Dagienė and S. Burkytė (2019), leadership is manifested through the sharing of responsibilities, community involvement, and active participation in joint activities. Therefore, it can be stated that the managerial skills highlighted by the informants correspond to the principles of implementing leadership. The research findings revealed that *the importance of the principal's honesty and fairness, predictability, firmness, calmness, openness to change, and moral and ethical qualities* was the most emphasised. Informants

highlighted humanity and respect for employees, emphasising that employees must feel safe and protected; therefore, these qualities are associated with creating emotional security and trust within the team. According to the research by R. Želvys, A. Zabardast, S. Nemati, et al. (2019), a principal's caring, ethical behaviour and predictability are significant for shaping the organisation's climate, because they strengthen employees' trust in the principal and in interpersonal relationships. Thus, the main qualities highlighted by the informants are important in implementing managerial leadership in an educational institution.

Table 4. The most important skills and qualities of principals for implementing leadership

The Most Important Skills and Qualities of Principals for Implementing Leadership	
Principals' skills	Principals' qualities
• the ability to unite a team • the ability to motivate employees • the ability to communicate and build connections • the ability to involve community members in decision-making • the ability to delegate and distribute responsibilities • the ability to work collaboratively • the ability to listen to every employee	• honesty and fairness • predictability • firmness and calmness • openness to change • moral and ethical qualities • humanity and respect for employees

Source: compiled by the authors (2026), based on interview data.

During the interview, the principals stated, in their opinion, the influence of a clear institutional structure on the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2 shows data indicating that, according to the research participants, a clear institutional structure affects leadership significantly. Most informants emphasised the clear division of responsibilities and its importance: *Of course [...] it was necessary to establish who is responsible for what [...] this clarity introduces* (V1, V3); *[...] a person has certain responsibilities* (V5); *[...] the structure is clear, who is responsible for what* (V7). They also highlighted adherence to subordination: *of course [...] in the structure we perform certain functions [...] we cannot overstep subordination* (V8) and the clarity and direction of ongoing processes: *Yes [...] the structure is [...] an important aspect [...] in the institution everything happens as a process* (V2); *everyone knows whom to contact* (V6). Principals emphasised that precisely and clearly defined functions provide more clarity in the structure, because employees know where to turn and who is responsible for what during the processes in the educational institution.

The research findings highlighted principals' opinions on the impact of a *safe and inclusive environment* on principals' leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution:

- emotional safety: *safe and inclusive, we are still working towards achieving it [...] values must start from the principal [...] safety must start from the principal [...] we need to support that* (V1, V4, V7, V8); *yes [...] the principal creates a safe environment where it is pleasant and calm* (V2); *yes, I think that is [...] important [...] emotional state [...] important [...] you feel safe, can work openly, calmly and go to work without fear [...] can perform your work properly and qualitatively* (V5);
- physical working conditions: *You know, yes [...] I need to create conditions for people to work [...] that also affects our physical environment [...] we must also provide physical conditions [...] teachers participate in decision-making when it is necessary to change the physical environment of the groups* (V3).

In summary, it can be stated that all informants consider a safe and inclusive environment as an important condition for the expression of leadership. Principals note that emotional security determines a safe environment where one can freely express opinions, collaborate, and work with quality. According to the informants, this security must first and foremost be consistently built by the principals themselves, setting an example

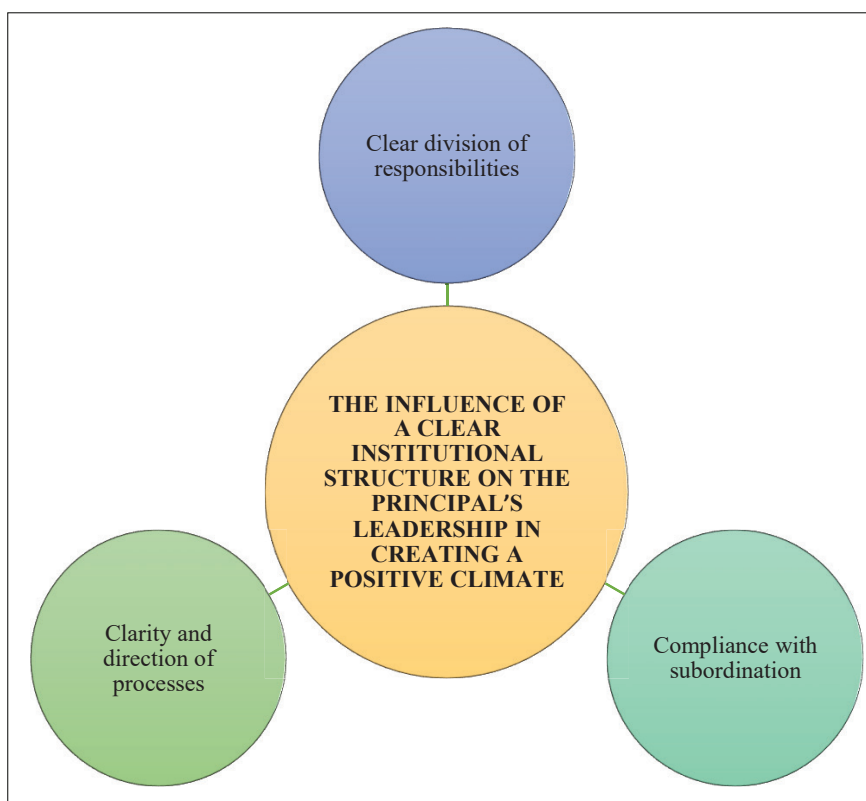


Figure 2. The influence of a clear institutional structure on the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate

Source: compiled by the authors (2026), based on interview data.

and maintaining a positive atmosphere. At the same time, physical working conditions are also emphasised, as they create opportunities for educators to work more effectively, involve teachers more in improving the environment, and encourage collaboration and job satisfaction.

Statements from the principals participating in the research revealed which factors determine a positive climate in the educational institution. The research findings are presented in Table 5.

It can be stated that a positive climate in a preschool education institution is determined by interrelated factors, which include the support of the principals, the emotional security created by them, communication based on respect and openness, and team involvement. Informants emphasise particularly the importance of the principal's support and emotional security, highlighting accessibility, the 'open door' principle, the possibility to seek help when problems arise, and a supportive attitude from the principal. The factors identified by principals are related to the relationships within the community. According to them, respect and open communication create positive relationships, while team involvement is important for mutual assistance, and the understanding that the institution's goals can only be achieved through collaboration. Thus, a positive climate is formed when the principal's leadership is combined with the community's interpersonal relationships.

During the interview, the principals stated how they propose to improve/develop their leadership expression as a principal by creating a positive climate in the preschool educational institution:

- it is necessary to *have that sense of togetherness more often [...] joint gatherings [...] social games [...] live connection, sincerity, face-to-face communication only strengthen team leadership [...] annual talks [...] provide a lot of information;*
- I suggest: *changing work groups so that they rotate [...] we always have an end-of-academic-year event, our meetings are always informal [...] excursions, parties, performances, kayaking [...] it's fun,*

Table 5. Principals' opinions on factors determining a positive climate in the institution

Category	Subcategory	Excerpts from interview texts
Factors determining a positive climate in the institution	The principal's support	<i>Specifically, I as a principal constantly support [...] I do not give up (V1). None of them are afraid to come to me [...] I support each one, I thank them for coming (V5). The ability to come to the principal at any time, the door is open (V7)</i>
	Emotional security created by the principal	<i>Safety must start with the principal (V2). This is safety, we are people, and we all want to feel comfortable and emotionally safe (V4). Emotional state [...] important [...] if you feel safe, then you can work calmly (V6)</i>
	Respect, openness and mutual communication	<i>I encourage behaving respectfully, do not dare to speak badly about another (V3). Open communication, as much as the employees allow [...] common agreements, respect, communication [...] I create a positive relationship (V7)</i>
	Team engagement	<i>I created work groups for teachers where they can express themselves, work in a team (V1). I am able to accept that everyone is different but needed for each other [...] we all work together in a team (V4)</i>

Source: compiled by the authors (2026), based on interview data.

and it brings the team together, it happened naturally [...] so-called extracurricular activities mostly unite [...] new connections emerge;

- *I recommend constantly improving positive relationships [...] always resolve conflicts or difficulties through dialogue [...] be open to each other, honest, or simply trust each other;*
- *to strive: striving for common goals, communicating and listening [...] overall compatibility when making decisions [...] we will apply continuous improvement methodology at the level of teachers [...] we will have our common goal, we will have common agreements, we will strive for goals, we will measure whether we have achieved them, we will look for reasons why we did not succeed, and we will improve [...] striving for a common goal unites the most because no one wants to be left out.*

All the principals who participated in the research acknowledge unanimously that leadership is not a process that happens by itself, it is created by the entire team forming a positive climate in a preschool educational institution. The findings of the research conducted reveal that leadership, together with teachers, must be continuously and purposefully nurtured and developed by creating mutual relationships and trust, open communication, and joint agreements. Leadership in preschool educational institutions manifests most often through workgroups, joint initiatives, and the involvement of teachers in decision-making. Only quality relationships between the principal and community members, a clear institutional structure, and a safe and inclusive environment directly influence the expression of the principal's leadership in creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution, as these factors promote respect, openness, shared responsibilities, and teachers' willingness to engage, and all of this combined reduces tension and improves interpersonal interaction.

Conclusions and discussion

The findings of the research allow for a more detailed assessment of the principal's leadership role in creating a positive climate in a preschool education institution. The research revealed that this topic is relevant, yet it has not been sufficiently examined within the context of preschool education in Lithuania. As the

education sector changes rapidly, the attitudes of employees towards emotional and social phenomena in the institution also change. It becomes evident that a principal's authority alone no longer ensures the success of the organisation. Leadership that is based on mutual trust, open communication and shared responsibility is necessary to strengthen the community and create an emotionally safe environment for all the participants in the educational process. This insight aligns with the principle of social constructivism, which asserts that the organisational climate is not an objectively given phenomenon, but is constantly created and maintained through the daily interaction and mutual communication between the principal and the community.

Research by A. Baravykaitė-Dagienė and S. Burvytė (2019) on leadership in preschool education institutions revealed that a principal's active involvement, initiative and sharing of responsibilities depend directly on their ability to create a collaborative atmosphere. These data coincide with the results of our research, as the principals also emphasised that their initiative, greater desire to participate in various activities, willingness to share responsibilities and decision-making, thus strengthening team collaboration and creating a positive climate in the institution, depend on the principal's support, trust in their competencies, and open mutual communication. This shows that the principal's leadership becomes significant to the extent that it is interpreted by principals as supportive and enabling, which aligns with the perspective of symbolic interactionism on meaning-making through everyday social interactions.

The authors' research revealed a similar opinion among principals as the results of the research by D. Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė and V. Strazdauskienė (2023) showed, which indicated that a principal is a leader, and a person whose personal traits and abilities naturally encourage others to follow them. Based on the principal's insights, leadership manifests itself in the ability to gain people's trust, and inspire people to act through personal example and pursue common goals.

During the research, the principals revealed the role of leadership in creating a positive climate in the preschool educational institution. It turned out that principals regard the role of leadership as an essential prerequisite for creating a positive climate in a preschool educational institution. In their opinion, the principal's mutual cooperation with the community, active involvement in joint activities, sharing of responsibilities, and ability to make decisions together, promote teamwork and create emotional safety in the staff. The informants revealed that leadership must be continuously purposefully cultivated and developed, by fostering interpersonal relationships and trust, open communication, and joint agreements. A clear institutional structure and a safe and inclusive environment directly influence the role of leadership in creating a positive climate in the preschool educational institution, as these factors promote respect, openness, the sharing of responsibilities, and the community's willingness to engage, all of which reduce tension and improve interpersonal interaction.

Research limitations: the research findings cannot be generalised for all Lithuanian preschool institutions, as the qualitative research was conducted with a small sample of informants.

Possibilities for the continuity of the research. The experiences revealed by the participants in this research allow us to state that such research is relevant, and requires continuity, including studies on the opinions of teachers, educational support specialists, and parents in the research field, with greater attention given not only to the expression of team leadership, but also to the expression of leadership in creating a positive climate in the educational institution. Internal and external assessments of activity quality are constantly conducted in preschool educational institutions. These assessments are often measured using standardised methodologies, but their results do not always reveal the complex aspects of interpersonal relationships, or the role and expression of leadership in the institution. Therefore, the findings of this research can be used by principals when planning annual activity plans, updating the institution's strategy, or organising professional development activities.

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LYDERYSTĖ IKIMOKYKLINIO UGDYMO ĮSTAIGOJE: VADOVO VAIDMUO KURIANT PALANKŲ KLIMATĄ

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Santrauka

Strateginiuose dokumentuose (Geros mokyklos koncepcija, 2015; Lyderystės ir vadovavimo švietimo įstaigose stiprinimo gairės, 2020; Valstybės pažangos strategija „Lietuva 2050“, 2024) ir mokslininkų (Kirby, Douglass, Lyskawa, 2021; Chkheidze, 2023; Angtud, Groenewald, Kilag ir kt., 2023) darbuose išryškinama vadovo lyderystės svarba ugdymo įstaigoje, kuriant palankų klimatą. „Geros mokyklos koncepcijoje“ (2015) pažymima, kad aiški, įkvepianti ir vienijanti lyderystė įgalina ugdymo įstaigos bendruomenės narius imtis iniciatyvos, prisiimti atsakomybę, drąsiai rizikuoti, priimti sprendimus ir aktyviai juos įgyvendinti. L. Miltenienės, J. Valuckienės, M. Damkuvienės ir kt. (2022), N. A. A. Angtud ir kt. (2023), S. Chkheidze (2023) tyrimais nustatyta, kad vadovo lyderystė skatina darbuotojų asmeninę ūgtį, padeda puoselėti pamatines hu-

manistines vertybes, (su)telkti bendruomenę, kurti palankų klimatą, motyvuoti ugdymo įstaigos narius prisiimti atsakomybę už ugdymo(si) kokybės gerinimą. Nepaisant augančio dėmesio švietimo lyderystės temai, moksliniai tyrimai dėl vadovo vaidmens kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje vis dar yra fragmentiški. Tai lemia mokslinę problemą, kuri formuluojama klausimu, koks vadovo lyderystės vaidmuo kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje? Tyrimo objektas – vadovo lyderystės vaidmuo kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje.

Tyrimo tikslas – atskleisti vadovo lyderystės vaidmenį kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje. Atliekant tyrimą taikyti *teoriniai* (mokslinės literatūros ir dokumentų analizė) ir *empiriniai* (iš dalies struktūruotas interviu, turinio analizė) tyrimo metodai.

Siekiant išsiaiškinti vadovo lyderystės vaidmenį kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje pasirinkta kokybinio tyrimo strategija. Tyrimas konstruojamas remiantis moksline literatūra, dokumentų analize, socialine konstruktyvistine ir simbolinio interakcionizmo teorinėmis priegomis, pagal kurias socialinė realybė formuojasi žmonėms nuolat bendraujant, dalijantis patirtimi, keliant bendras idėjas ir siekiant jas bendraujant tarpusavyje įgyvendinti. Todėl vadovų pasakojimai apie palankaus klimato kūrimą prisiimant lyderystę traktuojami ne kaip „objektyvių faktų“ ataskaitos, bet kaip reikšmių konstravimas, išryškinantis, kaip dalyviai suvokia, įvardija ir pagrindžia lyderystės vaidmenį kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje.

Vykdamas kokybinį tyrimą nustatyta, kad vadovo bendradarbiavimas su bendruomene, aktyvus įsitraukimas į bendrą veiklą, atsakomybių pasidalijimas ir gebėjimas priimti sprendimus kartu skatina komandinį darbą ir užtikrina kolektyvo emocinį saugumą. Remiantis vadovų įžvalgomis, vadovams lyderystės kompetencijas būtina nuolat kryptingai ugdytis ir tobulintis, puoselėjant tarpusavio santykius, užtikrinant pasitikėjimą, atvirą komunikaciją ir bendrus susitarimus. Tyrimo radiniai atskleidė, kad aiški įstaigos struktūra, saugi bei įtraukianti aplinka tiesiogiai veikia vadovo lyderystės vaidmenį kuriant palankų klimatą ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje, nes šie veiksniai lemia pagarbą, atvirumą, atsakomybių pasidalijimą, bendruomenės norą įsitraukti, visa tai mažina įtampą ir gerina tarpusavio sąveiką. Vadovai vieningai pripažįsta, kad lyderystė – ne savaiminis procesas, ją kuria visa komanda, ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigoje formuodama palankų klimatą. Lyderystė dažniausiai pasireiškia per darbo grupes, bendras iniciatyvas ir mokytojų įtraukimą priimant sprendimus. Šio tyrimo dalyvių atskleistos patirtys leidžia teigti, kad tokie tyrimai yra aktualūs, tad juos reikėtų tęsti, į tyrimų lauką įtraukiant mokytojų, švietimo pagalbos specialistų, tėvų nuomonių tyrimus, kur didesnis dėmesys būtų skiriamas komandinei lyderystei ugdymo įstaigoje kuriant palankų klimatą.

RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *lyderystė, ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaiga, vadovo vaidmuo, teigiamas klimatas.*

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