

Article

“It Required Lots of Energy from Me and I Didn’t Feel I Received Much in Return”: Perceptions of Educarers Who Dropped Out of the Ministry of Education’s Training Course Towards Their Dropping Out

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Abstract

This study explores dropout from professional training programs for early childhood educators from the perspective of those who left a national training course before completion—a viewpoint previously unexamined in Israel or internationally. While dropout has been studied in various educational contexts, this study addresses the research gap by focusing on the participants themselves. Based on semi-structured interviews with 15 educarers from four training colleges, the study identifies four key themes: (1) the challenge of learning in heterogeneous groups combining beginners and veterans that overlook prior experience; (2) the physical and emotional strain of attending evening classes after full workdays, particularly for mothers of young children; (3) disappointment with the lack of practical tools and an overly theoretical curriculum; and (4) the absence of emotional and professional support mechanisms during the course. These findings highlight a systemic misalignment between the structure of the training and participants’ lived realities. The study expands the job demands–resources model by framing dropout as an outcome of imbalanced responsibility across participants, training institutions, and workplaces. It calls for differentiated, context-sensitive training that integrates practical tools with theoretical content and provides sustained support to strengthen professional capacity and retention in the early childhood workforce.

Keywords: professional training of educarers; dropout from training courses; early childhood education and care (ECEC); infant-toddler care settings; quality of care and education; job demands–resources model



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1. Introduction

This article is based on a unique study that deals with the perceptions of early childhood educator-caregivers (educarers) who dropped out of the Ministry of Education (MOE)’s training course regarding the training process and the factors that led to their dropping out. The study seeks to examine how educarers who dropped out of the MOE’s training course perceive the training process and the aggregate of factors that led to their dropping out.

The study bridges the existing research gap within this field across two areas. The first is in presenting a fresh perspective by the participants who left the training course

before completing it; although various studies have been conducted about dropping out of school and dropping out of teaching, no studies have yet been found in Israel or abroad that address the topic of educators dropping out of training courses from the perspective of the participants themselves. The second relates to the development and expansion of the job demands–resources model of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001), based on the study findings.

It is thought that the lack of in-depth research in the field of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) ages birth to three stems from how women educators of infants and toddlers are perceived by the public as having low professional status and lacking appropriate professional training (Achituv & Hertzog, 2020a; Studny & Oplatka, 2022; Wright & Wise, 2012). Therefore, examining the training programs from the unique perspective of women educators in the field provides important information that may serve policymakers and training program planners in adapting training programs to ECEC staff. The changes and adjustments to be made may help contribute to the retention of quality personnel in the system, to raising the level of professionalism of educators, and consequently, together, may lead to improving the quality of education and care provided to toddlers in daycare centers in Israel.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Early Childhood Education Systems in Israel—Characteristics and Development

ECEC in Israel for ages birth to three is divided among several government ministries (Health, Welfare, Education), with each responsible for different aspects. Responsibility for the frameworks ranges from state and local government responsibility, through responsibility of public benefit corporations such as women's organizations, Chabad institutions, and others, to responsibility of private operators who operate solely for profit and are not under supervision. Out of 3526 entities operating education-care frameworks for ages birth to three, there are 15 education networks with independent training and supervision systems and 131 local authorities that operate daycare centers. In Israel 65% of children aged birth-to-three are in unsupervised private frameworks or at home with their families, and there is no information about them (Binnet, 2025).

Over the past decade, public awareness of the need for more significant investment in ECEC ages birth to three in Israel has been growing. This has been reflected in introducing changes including the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law from age three, the establishment of the Early Childhood Council, the Daycare Supervision Law, and the process that is perhaps the most important and significant—the transfer of responsibility for supervision of toddlers aged birth to three from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the MOE (Adi-Yaffe, 2022; Stolarski et al., 2024). The law was created as a result of public recognition that infants and toddlers must be provided with an optimal care environment and that the quality of care and education depends, among other things, on the level of the educational staff's formal education (Matattov Sekeles et al., 2024; Vaknin, 2021).

In addition to the structural changes and processes that have occurred since the establishment of the State of Israel, the prevailing perception has also changed from one that sees daycare centers primarily as childcare settings whose main purpose is to enable the mothers to enter the labor market. Over time, there has been a gradual shift from a care concept to a holistic educational approach, which focuses on the importance of the quality of education and care for the child while emphasizing the need to maintain a developmental continuum from birth to age eighteen (Trachtenberg et al., 2019; Vaknin, 2021). The importance of these changes in the concept of ECEC is particularly striking against the background of the unusual demographic characteristics of the State of Israel compared to OECD countries. Chief among these characteristics is the Israeli birth rate, which is double the average in OECD countries. The high percentage of young children

in Israeli society requires the state to develop and invest in quality ECEC settings, with the understanding that investing in the first years of life will yield positive returns in the educational, economic, and social domains as well as in the personal-family circle (Shavit et al., 2018; Vaknin, 2020).

Empirical research on educators in Israel remains relatively limited (Achituv & Hertzog, 2022; Matattov Sekeles et al., 2024; Stolarski et al., 2024; Vitiello et al., 2022), and most of it has concerned two main aspects: structural aspects, which include the poor physical infrastructure of the daycare centers and the training of the educator staff, and process aspects, which focus on the quality of the interaction between the educator and the child (Achituv & Hertzog, 2021; Rabinovich, 2023; Stolarski et al., 2024). Research findings in these areas have consistently indicated a low quality of daycare centers in Israel (Achituv & Hertzog, 2020b; Laor, 2016; Zano, 2019).

2.2. Challenges in the Early Childhood Education System in Israel

The early childhood system in Israel has always faced two prominent challenges: the urgency of increasing the numerical ratio between staff members and children and the difficulty of recruiting professional and skilled staff members who will remain in the system over time (Achituv & Hertzog, 2021; Laor, 2016; Zano, 2019). Previous research findings indicate a low percentage of educators in Israel who remain in this job for more than three years (Hasaisi, 2014; State Comptroller, 2022), and that a shortage of manpower is a major obstacle that prevents the optimal functioning of daycare center directors (Ben-David & Gutman, 2020). One of the factors influencing the decision of the educator staff to stay or leave the position involves conflicts with the management and unresponsiveness on its part (Blöchliger & Bauer, 2024), as well as poor employment conditions that include low pay, lack of professional advancement opportunities, and unreasonable workloads (Matattov Sekeles et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2023).

A recent study that examined the burnout and coping experiences of educators in daycare centers in Israel suggests a direct connection between the difficult working conditions in the daycare center and the feelings of burnout and stress among the educator staff (Matattov Sekeles et al., 2024). The study emphasized the need to improve working conditions, including compliance with OECD standards of the caregiver-child ratio, and developing training and intervention programs for candidates before entering the position and for its duration. There is an understanding that these are necessary conditions for retaining educational staff and improving the quality of ECEC in Israel.

2.3. Training of Educators Around the World and in Israel

Many training programs in the field of ECEC worldwide combine social-emotional aspects with pedagogical knowledge and tools (Pianta et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). Pianta and colleagues (Pianta et al., 2020) found that the quality of interactions between educators and students affects children's development, and their conclusion is that there is a need to develop educator training programs that focus on promoting communication skills and quality interactions. The researchers also found that training programs that improve the social-emotional competence of staff ward off their fatigue and mental burnout and promote their functioning in the educational framework. Several studies that dealt with the training of educational staff have found that offering continuous exposure to up-to-date knowledge and providing opportunities for customized professional development facilitate the provision of optimal educational-caregiving responses and well-being for children at different stages of development, especially children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Bierman et al., 2020; Laor, 2016). It was also found that it is important to align with

the specific and cultural needs of the educational staff when building a training program (Denham et al., 2021; Gat & Dayan, 2021; Recchia & Fincham, 2019).

Despite recognition of the importance of professional development for ECEC (birth to three) staff, professional training policies and educational requirements are not fixed and uniform worldwide. Research indicates that in many countries there is no uniform standard or clear formal requirement regarding the level of education required from ECEC teams, particularly for those working with infants and toddlers (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021; Obee et al., 2023). Most training programs for ECEC staff are in-service training rather than pre-service academic training before entering the workforce. In practice, many educators begin their work without any training at all and acquire their professional skills while working through courses, practical guidance, and professional mentoring. Additionally, it has been found that staff working with infants and toddlers receive fewer opportunities for training and professional development compared to educators working with ages 3–6 worldwide (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021).

The general socio-economic characterization of educators in Israel is very low. This characterization stems from the low employment conditions of educators and lack of education and basic requirements for the profession (Silverman & Blank, 2023). As elsewhere in the world, there has been an increased recognition in Israel of the need to train educator staff for toddlers in daycare centers. The training programs aimed to provide educators with the theoretical and practical tools required to ensure the optimal development of infants and toddlers in educational settings. Therefore, the MOE, in collaboration with the institutions for training teaching staff, has developed dedicated training programs intended for professional staff that will constitute mandatory training by 2026 for all educators who work in systems that include seven children and above. The programs will include exposure to up-to-date knowledge in the fields of child development, quality of care and pedagogy, parenting, and more. The core curriculum of the program allows the institution to add other relevant areas of enrichment of its choice. In addition, pedagogical and professional guidance are implemented within the daycare center for four hours per month (Adi-Yaffe, 2022; Rabinovich, 2023).

Israeli society is composed of several sub-societies with unique cultural characteristics that influence, among other things, child education. Educators in each of the sub-societies in Israel constitute significant socialization agents in ECEC (Gat & Dayan, 2021; Tzuriel et al., 2021). The training programs are implemented in 27 different institutions in Israel, representing the diverse Israeli cultural mosaic. It can be assumed that this diversity leads to different educational concepts and practices that are reflected in specific content and learning methods (Council for Higher Education, 2017). The training programs are offered with full funding from the MOE, and sometimes scholarships are added to them to encourage the participation of the educational staff in the daycare centers.

2.4. Dropout from Work and Professional Training Courses in the Field of Early Childhood Education

Few studies have been conducted on the subject of burnout and dropout from work in the field of ECEC in general (Mondi et al., 2024) and, particularly, dropout from professional courses of early childhood educators. Extant studies indicate that participants dropped out of training due to the difficulty of combining the requirements of the training course with their current work, as well as due to significant gaps between the participants in terms of educational background and previous professional experience (Fináncz et al., 2020). In a recent study that examined the burnout of educators in Israel, the workers described difficult working conditions and a sense of lack of appreciation from parents and the system. According to them, the main reasons for the high dropout rate in the industry are low wages, lack of professional recognition, and lack of institutional support (Matattov

[Sekeles et al., 2024](#)). Additional research findings suggest that the dropout phenomenon of educators is a result of burnout, stress, and dissatisfaction with working conditions, while one of the factors that protects against leaving the profession is participating in personal-professional development ([Cadima et al., 2025](#)).

[Demerouti et al. \(2001\)](#) developed the job demands–resources model of burnout. The model relates to dropout from teaching positions and focuses on the impact of the educational work environment on remaining in or leaving the job ([Bakker et al., 2005](#)). The model is based on the assumption that a job contains two components: demands and resources. The demands component refers to the demands of the job and the system and includes the emotional and intellectual efforts that the employee invests in order to hold his job and manage the workload it entails, for example, dealing with students, long working hours, etc. The resource component refers to the environmental characteristics of the workplace, such as support for the teacher from the administrative staff, receiving assistance in completing tasks, etc. ([Arbiv-Elyashiv & Zimmerman, 2015](#)). According to this model, the two components may be related to each other: for example, when there are high demands in the workplace, enlisting resources from external sources, such as providing emotional support and granting autonomy to the employee, may reduce their sense of stress and burnout and reduce the inclination to drop out.

While the original model focused on a clear dichotomy between demands and resources, today one may find various expansions and adjustments made to it. For example, in a study conducted on educators' dropout, a dynamic sequence was presented that describes how these factors can function both as a resource and as a demand, depending on the context and intensity of their appearance: the relationship between educators and the children's parents can appear as a resource when the relationship is positive and built on trust and as a demand when it is based on distrust and includes challenging parental behaviors ([Hamel et al., 2025](#)). Studies that were based on the job demands–resources model as a theoretical framework and examined the functioning of ECEC therapeutic staff and factors leading to their departure found that in order to foster professional and stable functioning of educators and maintain a sense of satisfaction and meaning from work, it is necessary to invest in building supportive relationships in the workplace (with management, parents, and team members) and provide employees with a sense of recognition, appreciation, and autonomy, rather than merely reducing work demands ([Heilala et al., 2021](#); [Ragadu & Rothmann, 2025](#)). In the discussion section below, we present the alignment of the research findings on the dropout of educators from professional training courses with the demands and resources model.

Evaluating the training program from the perspective of participants who dropped out of the program will help decision makers identify the demands versus the resources faced by educators as well as by the training institutions and policymakers, and thus help program leaders better adapt the program to their needs. In light of the literature review, the study focuses on a central question that seeks to examine how educators who dropped out of the MOE's training course perceive the training process and the aggregate of factors that led to their dropping out.

3. Research Method

This study was conducted according to the qualitative paradigm. The methodological framework of the article is based on the phenomenological approach ([Alase, 2017](#)). This genre was chosen in order to fully access the attitudes of the educators in an open format that provides a broad opportunity for the participants to express how they view the factors that led to their dropping out from the training courses.

3.1. Participants

The study involved 15 educators working in ECEC settings for children ages birth to three who enrolled in an MOE training course in 2022–2023 and attended a minimum of four to twenty sessions. The study participants studied at one of four colleges in the north of Israel: two state colleges, a religious state college, and an Arab-language college. The northern region of Israel is an extensive area that includes diverse populations and therefore is suitable for the purposes of our research.

The participants were asked about their years of formal education (not including courses or professional development programs). The basic education in Israel includes 12 years of formal schooling. Mention of years of study beyond 12 refers to studies for advanced academic degrees. Of all the participants, 12 are currently working in birth-to-three frameworks, and three ended their employment concurrently with dropping out of the training (Table 1). Participant characteristics can be found at Table 2.

Table 1. Number of students and dropouts from each college.

	Number of Students Who Started the Training in 2022–2023	Number of Students Who Completed the Training	Number of Dropouts	Percentage of Dropouts	Number of Participants in the Study
College No. 1	104	87	17	16%	6
College No. 2	103	89	14	14%	3
College No. 3	59	49	10	17%	2
College No. 4	120	90	30	25%	4

Table 2. Participant characteristics.

Mother Tongue	Hebrew (N = 9)	Russian (N = 2)	Arabic (N = 4)	Spanish (N = 1)
Age	23–64	36–57	26–45	45
Years of Education	10–14	13–14	12–16	18
Years of Experience	0.4–40	0.3–19	2–5	14.5
Number of Training Sessions	4–20	4–12	4–5	4

3.2. Research Instruments

The study used semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with each of the fifteen participants. Using this type of interview allows us to use a core set of questions that are subject to change according to the dynamics created with the interviewee and aims to understand the interviewees' perceptions of the issues raised in the study. This type of interview also gives the research participants the right to raise additional issues for discussion as necessary (Elbaz, 2013). The interviews took place via Zoom (Version 6.4.12; 64384) or by telephone during 2024.

3.3. Research Process and Ethical Issues

After receiving approval from The ethics committee of Oranim College of Education, we contacted the directors of the training programs and the instructors from the four colleges selected to participate in the study. We shared with them the purpose of the study and asked for their consent to participate in it. We then requested the list of dropouts from

the years 2022–2023. Upon receiving the list, we selected participants representing a variety of ages and sectors.

In order to select the appropriate interviewees from among all the dropouts, we conducted a preliminary conversation and examined the reason for dropping out. Interviewees who reported objective reasons (such as medical condition, relocation, cessation of work, etc.) were not included in the sample. For this study, only dropouts whose reason for leaving the training program was related to the training itself were interviewed. From the dropout data received, we conducted convenience sampling. We organized the data by sectors, and for each sector we recorded the number of years of education, number of years of experience, and number of training sessions attended.

We sent a message to each participant and asked to speak with her about her training process, her dropping out, and the reasons for leaving the course. Based on the demographic makeup of the course participant population, it was later decided to bring in two research assistants, one Arabic-speaking and one from the Haredi population, in order to help us reach these populations. The study was conducted in compliance with the processes set down by the ethics committee. The participants received clear and detailed information about the purpose of the study, which was designed to ensure anonymity, preventing the identification of participants or their workplaces; all the names presented in the findings section below are pseudonyms. The participants were not exposed to any risks as a result of their participation in the study, and all signed an informed consent form.

3.4. Analysis of the Findings

A qualitative content analysis was conducted for all interviews, in accordance with the methodology of [Strauss and Corbin \(2015\)](#). The analysis process included three coding stages: in the first stage, the significant categories were identified, which were mapped into main categories and subcategories (open coding); in the second stage, the connections between the various categories were examined and mapped (axial coding); and in the third stage, the central narrative of the phenomenon under study was formulated (selective coding) ([Khan, 2014](#)).

During the interview analysis process, each interview was divided into content units, and each content unit was given a corresponding code. Example codes include difficulty persisting in training studies, desire for schedule flexibility, unmet need for help, feelings of failure following assignments, feelings of loneliness during training, desire for official recognition, expectation for help throughout the training, criticism of teaching methods, and others.

In the next stage, all codes were divided into initial categories, for example, support and follow-up of participants, personal and professional crises, tension between home commitments and training commitments, time and logistical difficulties, quality and professionalism of instruction, and others. Subsequently, central categories were created. At this stage, it was decided whether to merge initial categories together or to abandon categories that were not central and significant. For example, the category of support and follow-up of participants and the category of personal and professional crises were incorporated under lack of personal and professional support mechanisms, and the initial category of quality and professionalism of instruction was thereafter included within the need for practical tools versus studying educational theories. Finally, four central themes were created that together answered the research question and reflected the main points expressed by the research participants.

In accordance with the principles of qualitative research to ensure the reliability of the study, a comprehensive database was built, and all analysis documents were saved. The

findings section incorporates selected quotes from the database that directly relate to the research questions.

4. Findings

The study discusses the perceptions of educarers about their training process and the factors that led to their dropout. During the interviews, they shared their perceptions of the training process and the factors that could have helped them complete the training. The first two themes that emerge distinguish between the participants according to different criteria, while the last two themes present perceptions that are common to all of them.

4.1. *Conformance with and Reference to Previous Experience and Knowledge*

Participants with many years of experience in the field (five years or more) spoke about the differences between their learning experience and that of participants who only recently started working. Galia, who has been working in the system for 40 years, describes her experience as a veteran educator: “Because of my experience, I understood exactly what was meant and what was being talked about, and then I could participate more and bring my years of experience, I could be more active.” When asked if the training meets the needs of a caregiver, she answered, “Yes, for newbies. I believe yes, for newbies.” It seems that it was important to her to make a distinction between the abilities and needs of veteran and new educarers. She may also be referring to the dynamics of shared group learning for veterans and novices, where veteran caregivers in the course have added value in that they can share their rich experience. Irit, who has been working in the system for 16 years, also wants to clearly differentiate between herself and a novice caregiver and emphasizes the differences:

I think there is a very, very big difference between someone who came to the course as a beginner, someone who just started working in preschools, and someone who really—really, I’m not just full of myself, okay?—but with so many years of experience and I’ve worked with the whole age range. There’s... a big difference.

It is very important for Galia and Irit that their experience be recognized and that it be reflected in the training, whether by dividing the groups or by using their knowledge and experience with the new participants. Other participants expressed frustration in belonging to heterogeneous groups in terms of experience and seniority at work, and claimed that if learning had been conducted in a group according to levels of knowledge and experience, they would have benefited from the course. For example, Hadas, who has been working as an educarer for 30 years, suggests a solution that might give her a better feeling throughout the training:

I had a hard time with the discrepancy between girls who have been working in the system for a year, while I’ve been in the system for almost 30 years, and we can’t be the same, it’s just not correct. I really know the work... Maybe if, let’s say, I was learning in a smaller class, with women like me who have more experience, then it would be easier for me to listen, hear, and share... I think it could have helped me.

The suggestion to divide the groups according to seniority may meet with the wishes of the veteran participants to feel professional pride and receive a sense of security, and at the same time a sense of recognition and appreciation for themselves and for the knowledge and experience they have acquired with great effort. It is important to note that this request did not come from the new educators, and it is possible that the shared learning with the veterans strengthened the novices and contributed to their sense of confidence;

hence, they did not experience it as something that should be changed or improved. The next theme also deals with the difficulty raised by a group of course participants with identical characteristics.

4.2. The Challenges of Studying After Work Hours

The course participants raised the difficulty of coming to the course after a grueling day of work and then studying late at night, sometimes in changing, temporary locations, and they describe this as a great inconvenience that affects their ability to study and concentrate. Moreover, a group of young mothers among them describe the difficulty of leaving their children at home and returning home late at night.

This is how Yelena describes the difficulty of the changing study locations: “We didn’t have a regular place to study; one day we studied at Beit Hahyal, another day we studied at the community center. So that also bothered me a bit, because I need to have everything organized.”

In addition to the difficulty expressed in the desire for regularity and order, the course participants spoke of the difficulty related to the study hours. Erin describes the difficulty she experienced: “The hardest thing for me was with the course times, because it’s after a workday when we finish at four thirty... For me, the main difficulty was with the scheduling, because it was a very hard day.”

The workday of educarers in childcare centers begins in the early morning hours, and it can be assumed that the expectation that they study after work hours presents them with many difficulties, such as fatigue, lack of concentration, worrying about children at home, thinking about household chores that are not completed on time, and more. Mira also refers to the evening study hours and spells out the difficulty of sitting in a chair for many hours and concentrating: “I’m sitting in a classroom after a day of work where you work very hard. Sitting in a classroom, in a chair, for hours, it wasn’t easy.”

The description of the extended sitting in the chair may express her desire to get off the chair and learn in an active and experiential way and not just frontally.

One caregiver, Daniela, elaborates and describes the difficulty that comes after dealing long hours with children and challenging behaviors:

We come after an exhausting day of work; the children are boisterous. They are two years old, they are that age, you know, when they are testing limits, they are not easy, they are very challenging. And then to come to study after a day like that. I thank God that I didn’t fall asleep in class.

From the participants’ words, it is evident how difficult it is to come to learn after an exhausting day at daycare, which requires them to marshal various energies—both physical energy for activities like lifting children, changing diapers, cleaning the facility, and more, and mental energy, which is necessary to deal with various difficulties that arise during the workday, such as interacting with different children at the same time, resolving social conflicts, containing crying, and more. Citing these conditions, they openly state in distress that they have difficulty concentrating during evening classes at the end of their workday.

Another opinion regarding the late course hours was raised around the subject of dealing with their own children who are left at home in the afternoon and evening and the need to find solutions for them. Daniela, who is a single mother, testifies to her personal difficulty:

I’m not talking about caregivers who don’t have children, it’s easy for them, they can do it at night, in the afternoon, they are always available. But for those who have children, it’s much more complicated. Also, it’s until 9:30 at night. Listen, it’s not easy, you need to find a babysitter... it’s not easy.

Just as caregivers with experience seek special recognition, it seems that caregivers who are mothers of young children also seek recognition and perhaps even some kind of concessions and consideration for their personal situation. Galia, who is not a young mother and does not have young children at home, also testifies to the difficulty she encountered with other caregivers in studying until late hours in remote places: “Girls left for technical reasons, travel that was difficult for them, leaving children at home. . . This was part of what particularly caused the married women [to leave the course] that they left children at home.” It seems that the gender aspect represents a significant component of the challenges faced by the course participants, and the expectation that mothers go to work and study and also function as full-time mothers tips the scales and makes it difficult for them to function on all fronts.

In contrast to the need raised only by the veteran caregivers to separate experienced educators in the profession from those who are just starting out and the desire for special consideration for caregivers who are mothers of young children, the issue of motivation and the need for emotional and professional support during the training emerged overwhelmingly from all participants.

4.3. The Need for Practical Tools Versus Studying Educational Theories

The participants often described the gap between their perception of insufficient provision of practical tools and the extensive focus on theories during the training. They felt that the initial stage of the lectures focused on learning educational theories but was disconnected from their practical application. For example, Yelena, a caregiver with 19 years of experience in the system, explains:

First of all, maybe a little less theory. It was too theoretical. . . and more, more practical things. . . Then more tools for the caregiver, . . . for how to behave with them, how to reach them. . . The theories of Piaget, Erikson, you have to know, but not in such depth.

Yelena’s criticism of too much depth in theoretical content is obvious. It seems to express the gap between the caregivers’ expectations for training that includes a professional and practical course and the reality that included mostly theoretical training.

Galia, a course participant with 40 years of experience, describes the requirement to memorize material at the expense of the applied aspects: “More tangible, more things from the field. . . There was a lot of material to remember and a lot of material to memorize. They didn’t sit down to memorize.” She seems to be saying that this demand was unrealistic for the course participants, and therefore she suggests that the training treat familiar issues that all caregivers deal with on a daily basis (such as, What do you do when a child bites at daycare? How do you calm a crying child when the parent leaves in the morning?) while providing important “tips.” Mira, a caregiver with five years of experience, explains why she believes the applied aspects are important:

Application in the field is much more effective than learning in the classroom. . . More application in the field, not what Freud would say. . . All kinds of things that are nice to know in principle, but. . . less effective for us in the field. More. . . of the practical aspect.

Avishag also agreed with the feeling that it was important to start the training with much less theory:

If I were planning this training course, I would at least start by answering some very basic things that would, I don’t know, straight away feel really important from the beginning, and maybe then get to some theoretical content that they think is relevant.

Avishag emphasizes the importance of having the training course begin with content that would be relevant and immediately applicable in the field from the participants' perspective. It seems that the participants' disappointment with the abundance of theories compared to the scarcity of engagement with applied aspects stemmed from a desire to function better in their work and the need to provide answers tailored to their actual needs. The discrepancy between the participants' expectations of the training content and the content actually learned may indicate a disconnect between the lecturers who led the training and the participants and their needs in the field. This raises the problem of bringing lecturers into the training program who come from academia without any experience in the early childhood educational field. This gap may also reflect a deeper tension between academia and the field of education, which is experienced in various arenas.

In addition to disappointment with the program's lack of practical aspects, all the course participants raised the need for personal and professional support throughout the training.

4.4. The Lack of Personal and Professional Support Mechanisms

The participants expressed frustration and disappointment that they were not provided with help with various personal difficulties along the way, as well as professional help in dealing with the course content and the various required assignments. Sasha, who went through a complex personal experience during the training period and felt that the daycare center management had abandoned her, underwent a similar experience with the training course instructors: "If they had asked why you didn't come? Maybe you'd continue? Maybe we'd find some... solution? No one, no one asked." Sasha represents the basic desire for people to notice her existence, to take a personal interest in her, and to be able to see her as a person before seeing her merely as one of the participants. Similarly, Nava relates to the feeling of loneliness and helplessness when dealing with personal problems, which affected her attendance and performance in the course: "I'm telling you, no one reached out to me, no one came to me and said, 'Let's help you.'" Nava adds that in addition to personal support, she also needed professional support in dealing with the course assignments:

I would like to have help with the assignments, and God willing, my biggest dream is that I will succeed, and that I will at least have this one certificate in my hand... I was a little upset because there was no one to help me and no one to give me the tools... I don't mean that, God forbid, I was some kind of dimwitted person or something, just that there were things that were new to me and that I hadn't learned.

Nava refers to the desire for recognition and to receiving the certificate as a desired goal that she wants to achieve, after a series of failures in educational settings, as well as the effect of the lack of support on her motivation to persevere and complete the training. The feeling of failure also preoccupies Hadas: "I am not good at studying, I really am not good, but there are assignments. It's very hard for me... I'm telling you these things because I'm very distressed about it." Hadas's statements indicate a low self-image and a fear of everything that her academic studies represent for her, as well as a feeling of a lack of personal competence. The parallels between the training studies and the students' previous experiences in academic studies are constantly emerging, leaving them with recurring feelings of burning failure.

Another subject that arises is the difficulty coping with reading materials, writing assignments, and fear of a final exam. Irit tells about the various difficulties she had as a student with ADHD:

I guess I'm undiagnosed ADHD... It was hard for me. Let's say in class, I somehow managed... But when it came to all sorts of work, homework, studying for tests, preparing a summary paper, here, wow, it came out big time... For me, it was too much... I didn't submit the work because I wasn't able to do it.

From what they said, it seems that the course participants would be happy if the program designers built personal and professional support mechanisms for them during the course, which would allow them to persevere and complete the training and, above all, create a sense of pride and a corrective experience after the many past failures that they carry with them. An important point to consider is the guidance and support required for educarers who come to training individually and need special attention as compared to educarers who come to training as a group (several educarers from the same educational framework) and may constitute a kind of support group for each other.

In conclusion, the research findings bring to light four central themes in the perceptions of the educarers who dropped out of the training courses. The first two themes distinguish between different groups of participants: between veterans and newcomers, and between mothers of young children and those who are not. Alongside the differences and unique needs of subgroups among the participants, common challenges also emerge that are surprisingly consistent. The last two themes characterize the challenges common to all the course participants and reflect the complexity of the training process for them. It is interesting to note the hidden gap that was revealed between the veteran caregivers' self-perception as having knowledge and experience and the desire for recognition of this knowledge and the need they express for practical training and emotional and professional support, similar to the new caregivers. Even the veteran caregivers, contrary to expectation, emphasize the need for "real-world" application and less for theories, and the need for guidance and support, no less than their new colleagues in the profession.

5. Discussion

This study examined the unique perspective of educarers who dropped out of the MOE's training course regarding the training process and the factors that led to their dropping out. The findings indicate a number of systemic and personal challenges that may have implications for the structure and content of the training course. In this section, we discuss the theoretical and applied implications of the findings, connecting them to the theoretical framework and to previous research.

The ECEC system in Israel faces unique challenges, which led to the development of dedicated training programs for educarers. However, the data indicate that between 10 and 30% of participants in the training courses drop out during the courses. This data requires a reexamination of the training structure and its adaptation to the needs of the participants, with the aim of reducing dropout rates, improving the training process, and ultimately enabling educarers to persevere and become more professional in their work.

In order to identify challenges in the training process and optimize it in accordance with the needs arising from the field, we present below a unique development of the job demands–resources model of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001), which deals with the impact of the educational work environment on remaining in or leaving the job (Figure 1). The development is based on the research findings and includes several changes and extensions to the basic model:

Unlike the original model that relates to dropout from workplaces, the model presented here refers to the requirements and resources that contribute to participants either successfully completing professional training courses or dropping out of them. In addition, several divisions and subdivisions were added to both the demands and the resources. The course requirements were divided into the physical and organizational requirements

required of the participant (for example, attendance and punctuality, meeting course requirements, etc.), physical and organizational requirements required of the training body (for example, training of lecturers, adapting the content to the participants' prior knowledge and experience, etc.), and professional requirements of policymakers (for example, the nature of the training, who will finance it, what content it should include, etc.). Similarly, the resources were also divided further as follows: personal resources of the participant (for example, perception of the training, self-image and professional image, desire to learn and develop, etc.), physical, psychological, and organizational resources of the training body (for example, feedback and support from the faculty, organizational flexibility, adaptation to multiculturalism, etc.), and physical, psychological, and organizational resources of the participant's workplace (for example, professional support from the daycare center director in dealing with course assignments, providing a substitute for the participant during training hours, etc.).

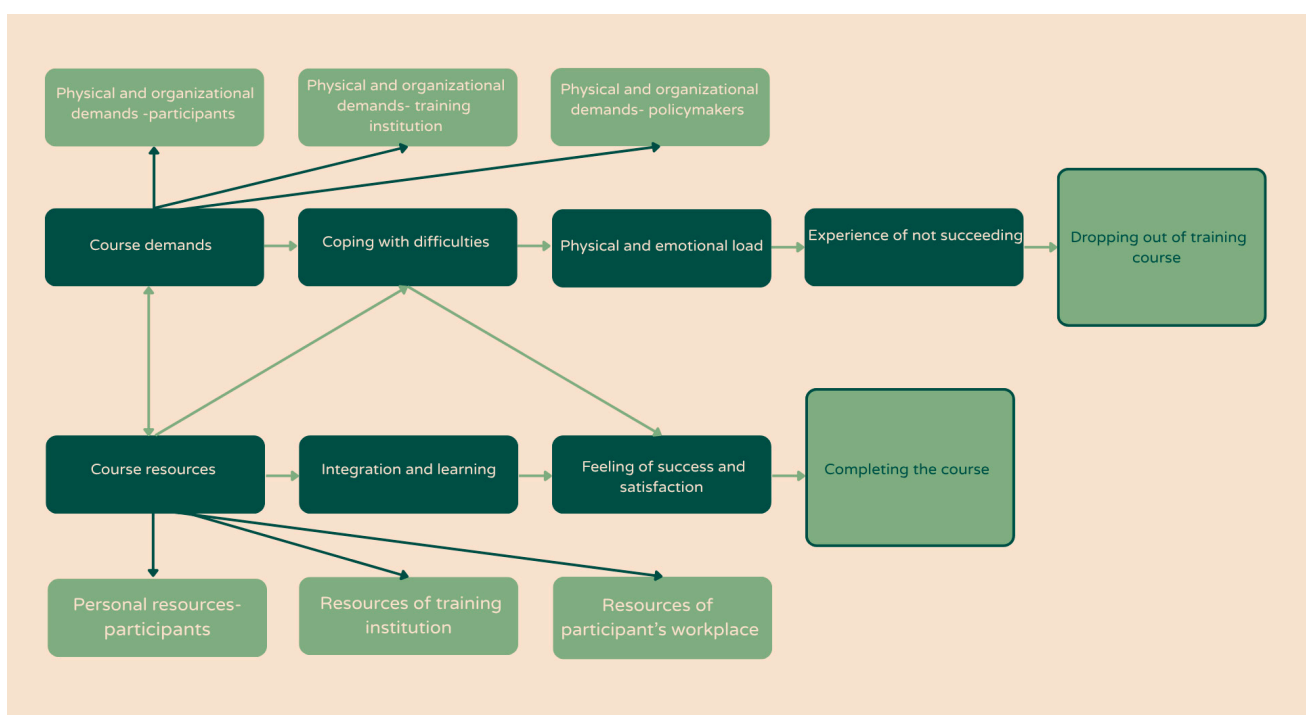


Figure 1. Extended job demands–resources model illustrating factors that influence dropout from the ECE training program.

These divisions represent the perception that the responsibility for participation in the training and its successful completion does not lie solely on the shoulders of the training body but is divided equally between the course participant, the training body, and the workplace. Therefore, both the demands and the resources are located within each of these factors and may influence the participant's sense of experience and satisfaction that will lead her to complete the training, or alternatively, to a sense of failure that will lead her to drop out of the training. Below, we discuss the connection between the findings presented so far and the professional literature, all in line with this model.

In 2025, the MOE modified the structure of the training courses for educators and opened a shortened training course intended for veteran caregivers (with five years of experience or more) comprising 120 h of training, all theoretical (Ministry of Education, Teaching Staff Authority). The change apparently stems from heeding the voices of those working in the field who want to conduct differential training according to the caregivers' seniority. This change is in line with the research findings, which also indicated the need to

adapt the training to the seniority of the participants. However, it seems that in planning the content of the new course, the MOE did not take into account one of the key findings in the current study, namely, that veteran caregivers need not only theoretical training but also, and in particular, applied tools, professional guidance, and emotional support, similar to new caregivers.

A study conducted in Israel that examined teacher dropout from the education system and from training courses concluded that professional development is most effective when it is customized to the specific stage and context of the educators' professional development. It was also found that veteran teachers need support in terms of professional development, renewing motivation, and coping with educational policy changes no less than new teachers (Timor, 2017). Another study that dealt with teachers' learning and deepening their knowledge found that the teachers learned and developed more significantly when they were given the opportunity to experience and implement changes in their classrooms, rather than by theoretical learning (Stillman, 2011).

Another article that discussed the importance of professional competence for early childhood educators noted that professional competence should focus on the ability to apply knowledge and not just to acquire theoretical knowledge (Barenthien et al., 2020). The claim of the course participants in this study about the lack of applied aspects in the courses as one of the reasons for their leaving the courses reinforces the findings of these studies. Apparently the need to integrate applied aspects throughout the entire training from beginning to end and in each type of training course (basic, advanced, and shortened) cuts across cultures and sectors.

The current study examined a heterogeneous population, which characterizes Israeli society. According to Gat and Dayan (2021), understanding these cultural differences is essential for developing culturally adapted training programs for Israeli educators. When designing the research, we had expected that different findings would be discovered depending on the demographic characteristics of the population (such as Haredi, Arab, secular, kibbutzim, etc.). However, it turns out that these differences were not reflected from the perspective of the participants who left the training courses, and it seems that the sweeping statement about the challenges in the field of professional training across sectors is common to all of them. Research indicates that academic demands, such as assignment and exam loads and meeting deadlines, constitute a universal challenge for learners, regardless of the cultural background from which they come (Bakker & Mostert, 2024; Martin et al., 2025). One example of this is the finding that emerged repeatedly regarding the importance of professional and personal support throughout the training. This aspect is also found in study findings reflecting the demand of educators for professional and personal guidance, both from colleagues and from professional bodies (Emolina, 2011; Jumani & Malik, 2017). Emolina (2011) and Timor (2017) recommend creating learning groups for new educators led by veteran educators. These groups will facilitate the mobilization of the latter's extensive knowledge and accumulated experience in order to initiate new recruits into the role and thus strengthen each and every participant.

Additional studies indicate the great contribution of personal mentoring throughout professional training and highlight the importance of a personal and group process that includes sharing and reflection and thus contributes to increasing the sense of competence, strengthening social support, and coping with emotional challenges in the training track. Moreover, building supportive professional communities, especially for educators who work with toddlers and sometimes suffer from a sense of professional loneliness, helps to ensure the success of professional training and has been found to be significant and important for them (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021; Shalev & Gidalevich, 2024; Siraj et al., 2019). As a result, combined support that includes both formal support (mentor) and informal

support (peers) may serve as a significant resource in the professional development process and reduce the experience of overload and burnout.

The importance of professional and personal support for participants can be demonstrated according to a job demands–resources model of dropout from training courses that was developed for analyzing the findings of this study. Professional and personal support is a resource that may come from both the training body (for example, support for personal difficulties from the course instructor) and the workplace (such as support from the daycare director and assistance in understanding the tasks) and from the participant herself (high motivation for learning, high self-esteem). Studies that examined the burnout of educators and their motivation for learning revealed the importance of emotional and professional support for them in order to increase their sense of self-efficacy, increase their motivation for learning, and prevent them from leaving the system. In addition, it was found that the success of educators is influenced not only by their personal skills and resources but also by their work environment and the professional and emotional support it provides for them (Ahmad et al., 2020; Cadima et al., 2025). The extensive fragmentation of the ECEC system in Israel, as described in the literature review, creates challenges in designing uniform policy and leads to difficulty in supervision and effective coordination between the various entities. It is possible that in a more synchronized and less fragmented system, integration between the different resources could have been achieved as described in the expanded model we presented. The fragmented system also indicates the need for a coordinated and uniform supervision mechanism that would ensure continuous educational monitoring and provide professional responses to needs arising from the field (Binnet, 2025).

Many of the participants noted the difficulty of combining their commitments to work, family, and studies, especially considering that the training courses take place in the evenings. They described the workload, the struggle to manage family life and studies, the lack of stability in the training location, and the difficulty of arriving there after an exhausting day at work. Some even linked the workload to an experience of frustration or a decrease in motivation that led to them dropping out of the course. Many women in Israel and worldwide are required to deal with heavy workloads while managing family life (De Los Santos et al., 2023). A recent study conducted in Israel among elementary school educators found that work–family conflict is one of the significant factors affecting teacher well-being, especially for women and mothers of young children (Awwad-Tabry et al., 2023). Another study emphasizes the importance of organizational flexibility as a condition for effective participation in professional training, concluding that conflict between employment demands and training course schedules constitutes a significant barrier for women, especially for mothers of young children (Cadima et al., 2025). In addition, it was found that training programs that took place in a fixed and accessible location contributed to higher persistence of the participants (Egert et al., 2020).

Looking at the model developed for the analysis of the study findings, it seems that the efforts of the course participant to maneuver between the demanding requirements of work and training and the commitment to family dilute her available resources and may lead to her dropping out (Brownstein-Berkowitz, 2023). This insight is consistent with our findings, which show that educators, especially mothers of young children, need additional resources to cope with this conflict between the demands of work, training, and family.

The findings of the current study, which stem from the distinctive perspective of the participants who dropped out of a training course, emphasize the need to rethink the structure of the course, its content, and its management while adapting it to the needs of the participants. This is to ensure higher quality training, which will lead to improved quality of education and care for toddlers in daycare centers and will help address the problem of staff shortages in daycare centers.

6. Practical Recommendations

The practical recommendations that emerge from this study concern both policymakers and those who plan and implement training programs for educators, and they will be presented according to the four themes that emerged in this study. The first theme dealt with the study participants' request to adjust the course to their previous level of knowledge and experience. Based on this, it is recommended to establish learning groups for new educators which are led by veteran educators. These groups will provide a space for professional discourse and help with challenges that arise in the field, all while sharing the knowledge and experience accumulated by the veteran educators. Establishing these groups responds to both the need for recognition and appreciation of the knowledge and experience of the veteran caregivers and the need for personal and professional support among new educators.

The next topic dealt with the challenges that characterize afternoon classes at the end of the workday. Training planners are advised to take into account the logistical constraints of the early childhood workforce, namely, being flexible and considering work–study–family balance. Such consideration in adapting the training frameworks to the reality of the participants' lives, for example, could mean holding some sessions in the morning, providing the option of hybrid participation, or reducing the frequency and length of the sessions. It is also recommended that a day of training be recognized as a workday, as is the practice for MOE kindergarten teachers who work with children aged 3–6. This would allow educators to devote themselves to learning and professional development and, consequently, would encourage the entire ECEC system to become more professional and provide an optimal and supportive environment for infants and toddlers.

The third theme that emerged from all the participants concerns the need for applied tools and highlights the gap between the theoretical knowledge taught in the course and the practical needs of the participants. Therefore, it is recommended to gradually integrate theoretical content, constantly integrating it with field demonstrations: watching videos, analyzing events, practical exercises, and group discussions around educational dilemmas, all this while adapting the material to each participant's professional progress. The emphasis on practice as a learning resource does not dismiss the importance of theory but rather requires a constructive and gradual integration of both throughout the training. It also emphasizes the importance of all lecturers being familiar with and having experience in the field of ECEC and its unique characteristics. It is important to avoid the assumption that only beginners require applied learning but rather to treat the training process as a platform for applied professional development for all participants—taking into account their individual starting points. In this context, one might recommend a coordinating body for all the training institutions. This body would serve to professionally coordinate their efforts and represent a meaningful professional learning community for them.

The last theme, which deals with the absence of support mechanisms, pointed out the need for emotional and professional support, a need expressed by all participants, regardless of seniority, experience, and cultural belonging. Research shows that negative school experiences in childhood, such as repeated failure experiences as well as gaps between environmental expectations and achievements, create persistent feelings of incompetence, frustration, and low self-image. All these also affect in adulthood the perception of capability and motivation for learning and sometimes even cause avoidance of coping with academic challenges (Levkovich & Elyosef, 2020). Lacking support mechanisms, participants may encounter high demands that are not accompanied by moderating resources, a situation that may undermine the sense of competence and increase burnout and dropout. Therefore, it is recommended that professional training include well-defined support mechanisms for all participants, such as personal mentoring by training instructors

and a combination of peer mentoring, such as veteran educators who would accompany new educators throughout the course. Furthermore, it is recommended to build professional learning communities of participants, which create a network of mutual support over time, both on an emotional and professional level. Unlike mechanisms that focus on guidance from veteran instructors or educators, this recommendation emphasizes the importance of support created from the connections between the participants themselves as part of a process of collaborative learning and a sense of group belonging.

7. Research Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of the current study stem from the fact that the study included data from only four training colleges and focused on a specific region in Israel (the northern region). Another limitation concerns the period when the study was conducted; the interviews with the dropout participants were conducted while Israel was engaged in a war of attrition that began on 7 October 2023. During this period, Israeli society experienced a crisis that affected all segments of the population. Many people experienced bereavement and loss in close circles, as well as concern for family members serving on the front lines. Many families from northern Israel were evacuated from their homes to temporary housing for an undetermined period, a situation that also affected the opening and operation of educational frameworks in general, including early childhood frameworks located in these regions. These events undoubtedly had an impact on the general situation of the study participants, and one may assume that this was expressed, even if obliquely, in the interviews with them.

It is recommended to continue to research the professional training of educators from additional perspectives, such as the perspective of educators who completed the training courses, instructors in training courses, training planners, and directors of the settings from which the trainees came. It is also recommended to expand the research to additional regions in Israel and around the world and to continue to examine the unique perspective of this study at different points in time, such as during routine times.

This pioneering study, which sheds light for the first time on the unique perspective of early childhood educators who have dropped out of training courses, makes a significant contribution by developing and expanding the job demands and resources model. The current model reflects a holistic view reflecting the shared responsibility of the training course participants, the training bodies, and the workplaces in ensuring the quality and success of the training. The research findings constitute an essential infrastructure for designing customized training programs that contribute both to the well-being and professionalism of early childhood educators and to improving the quality of education and care provided to toddlers in daycare centers in Israel and around the world.

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