

Title: Advancing Early Childhood Leadership Through the PERMAH Model: Motivators, Challenges, and Insights

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Summary

This study examines how pre-school Early Childhood (EC) leaders adopt the PERMAH model to enhance staff well-being and leadership efficacy, addressing a gap in research on well-being frameworks in Singapore pre-schools. Developed by psychologist Martin Seligman, the PERMAH model is a widely recognized, evidence-based framework that enhances well-being in individuals and organizations. The PERMAH model comprises six key elements - Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, and Health. While some Singapore primary and secondary schools have incorporated this model under the guidance of school leaders, its application in pre-school leadership remains underexplored.

This study engaged 22 EC leaders from NTUC First Campus, Singapore's second-largest pre-school operator. These leaders participated in a three-month course introducing the PERMAH model to enhance well-being at personal, team, and child levels while strengthening leadership efficacy. A mixed-methods approach—combining surveys with both EC leaders and their mentors at the pre-schools, as well as in-depth interviews with the EC leaders themselves—was employed. Thematic analysis revealed key insights into the motivators, challenges, and systemic factors that influence the adoption of the PERMAH model.

Findings

The findings are:

- *Strong Positive Sentiment:*
Both EC leaders and their mentors displayed strong positive sentiment toward the PERMAH model, noting beneficial effects on well-being, working relationships and resilience to adapting to changes and taking on challenges. Real-world observations included improved emotional regulation and positivity among EC leaders, teachers, and children.
- *Motivators for Adoption of the PERMAH model:*
The primary motivators for adoption of the PERMAH model were strong peer-relationships, leadership support, and personal growth. EC leaders felt more motivated at work and valued participating in team activities, as well as developing a more positive perspective when faced with challenges. A supportive principal or mentor was highlighted as essential for sustained adoption.

- *The Understanding-Application Gap:*

While EC leaders demonstrated strong conceptual understanding of PERMAH's pillars, they struggled with consistent practical integration. In their assignment which required them to describe the PERMAH model and its application, most EC leaders scored between 5 and 7 out of a total of 10, indicating that while the framework is well understood, real-world use remains uneven.

- *Challenges and Barriers:*

The main barriers to effective implementation were time constraints, perceived additional workload, resistance to change, inconsistent application and staff turnover. Many noted how competing priorities, and a fast-paced environment made it difficult to apply new concepts consistently.

Recommendations

From the findings, we propose next practical steps for different key stakeholders:

For Researchers:

Further research could explore PERMAH's impact on leadership outcomes, starting with a pilot centre focused on the *health* pillar. This will integrate mindfulness practices into preschools to enhance leaders' and educators' resilience and coping abilities.

For Practitioners and Leadership Teams:

Sustained adoption of PERMAH begins with *learner ownership* and a *growth mindset*. Leaders need to take charge of their learning and reflect regularly. *Leadership support* is equally crucial - our study showed that when principals were actively involved, PERMAH strategies were more successfully implemented. Experiential learning within centres should also be encouraged.

For Policymakers:

We suggest structural changes by adapting the preschool curriculum to include PERMAH in bite-sized, practical ways - For example, starting with one pillar. Health pillar could be embedded into current curriculum activities to enhance staff coping abilities in the fast-paced environment:

- 1) By introducing Mindfulness practices, for instance, to build calmness and staff's emotional resilience.
- 2) Support this with staff training—offered in-centre, virtually, or in classrooms—and collaborate with curriculum specialists to align training with existing frameworks.

Finally, we suggest creating a *Community of Practice* platform to sustain momentum. This enables ongoing dialogue, sharing of experiences, and peer learning, which are essential for long-term impact on educator well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, integrating PERMAH into early childhood leadership yields improvements in well-being, teamwork, and resilience; however, EC leaders need support in bridging the gap between understanding and consistent application. Focused training, reinforced through mentorship and peer collaboration, can drive and achieve maximum impact.

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