



School Leadership Development in Saudi Arabia: Policy-Makers' and Participants' Perspectives

Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the University of Nottingham

School of Education

2024

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Abstract

This thesis examines school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia by conducting 35 interviews with principals, junior teachers, senior teachers and policy-makers. The study reveals mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of leadership development programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education. Policymakers claim that the Ministry is actively working on initiatives to enhance leadership capabilities through developing soft skills and fostering collaboration. Exchange programmes are utilised to facilitate collaboration and networking among teachers, although many of these events are perceived to lack a validated methodology for promoting leadership skills. The Tatweer programme offers some leadership development opportunities, but participation varies significantly across schools. Some schools developed their own successful leadership initiatives, while others lack sufficient support. Self-development emerged as a crucial factor for leadership development, particularly in schools with fewer formal opportunities. Overall, the study suggests that, while Ministry-led programmes are valuable, they need substantial improvement to address the leadership development needs of both junior and senior teachers.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father. I embarked on my PhD journey in October 2019 with great anticipation, and my father and I eagerly counted the days until my graduation. However, fate had other plans. Sadly, my father passed away in December 2019, leaving a profound void. It is to his pure and cherished soul that I dedicate this work.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to God for blessing me with health, determination, patience, and strength throughout my doctoral studies. I also wish to express my deepest appreciation to the government of Saudi Arabia for their financial support and for providing me with the opportunity to pursue higher education at the University of Nottingham.

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Tony Bush, for his boundless enthusiasm, care, and exceptional guidance throughout my doctoral journey. I also thank Dr. Simin Ghavifekr, who joined at the beginning of my third year. Her presence was a unique and invaluable addition. Additionally, I acknowledge Professor Andy, who was with us until halfway through the journey. He has been endlessly supportive. It has been an honour to be mentored by such distinguished scholars. Their frequent feedback and unwavering support were instrumental in the completion of this thesis. I extend my sincere thanks to the participants of my research project, whose time, thoughts, and insights were invaluable. Their contributions significantly enhanced my understanding of Leadership development in Saudi schools.

On a personal note, my deepest gratitude goes to my family, whose unconditional love and moral support have been the cornerstone of my success. They supported me with care and love, helping me achieve my goals. I am deeply thankful to my wife, Norah, for her constant inspiration, encouragement, and endless love. I owe a special apology to my dear children, Shahad and Mohammed, for the times I was absent and missed being with them. I promise to make up for the lost time and be more present in your lives.

Lastly, my heartfelt thanks go to my brothers, sisters, friends and colleagues for their prayers and unwavering support throughout this journey.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The work of educational leaders is complex. Individuals have multiple expectations from education, and it is the task of educational leaders to navigate those expectations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). For example, an educational leader responsible for leading a department may have multiple expectations from the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents, and children, which may make it hard to satisfy everyone's interests and wishes (Castro, 2022; Miller, 2018). It could be argued that educational leaders also have pressure to lead so that their staff are happy and productive, but in doing so, they also have to make sure that staff meet multiple expectations (Jackson, 2012). This tension is also evident in the different views on the purposes of education, which may be considered a human right (Shields, 2013) but may also be expected to contribute to the economy (Cutler, 2014). The challenge is to develop leaders who can address those multiple expectations, but the existing research points to the lack of proper focus on leadership preparation (Bush, 2018).

The focus of this study is to understand the nature and importance of leadership development and why leadership development is important for schools in the centralised educational system of Saudi Arabia. The underlying rationale is that leadership development within schools in the centralised context of Saudi Arabia may be limited as the Ministry of Education makes vital decisions in relation to curriculum design, teaching methods, and the evaluation criteria used to assess students' performance (Alquraini, 2011). Hence, it is important to understand the perspectives of policymakers, school leaders and teachers to assess how they understand leadership, how they develop it, and how they enact it in order to improve educational outcomes in Saudi schools.

Research on school leadership increasingly highlights the significance of context (Hallinger, 2018). According to Hallinger (2018), school contexts are divided into institutional, community, sociocultural, political, economic, and school improvement. Institutional context includes the degree of centralisation, school districts' aims, norms, and size, as well as the overall national educational system (Hallinger, 2018). The

community dimension of the school context includes rural/urban divisions, relationships with local stakeholders, including parents, and local resources. Sociocultural context involves the characteristics of the national culture, while economic context refers to economic and resource-related conditions faced by the schools. According to Hallinger (2018), political context is also very important because it shapes discourses around education and affects the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of school leaders. Finally, every school exists within the unique discourse of school improvement, which can be defined on a spectrum from effective to ineffective (Hallinger, 2018). This position is believed to affect the way leaders gain control of the environment, what leadership styles they use, and what goals they set (Yeigh et al., 2018). This chapter uses this typology of school contexts to explain how these currently shape school leadership in Saudi Arabia.

Theoretical Context: Leadership and Leadership Preparation/Development

Leadership is defined by Bush (2007) as a process of influence established on clear norms and beliefs leading to a vision for the school. The role of leaders is important in communicating this vision to all stakeholders to develop a better future for the school (Bush, 2007). The focus of this paper is on principals, vice-principals, and department heads, who have administrative-focused leadership responsibilities that exclude working directly with students (Alghamdi et al., 2022). According to Sarwar et al. (2022), these leaders focus on managing educational and cultural reforms through communicating vision, increasing participation, and promoting change. They are also tasked with leading, directing, and coordinating school activities, creating a favourable environment for learning, and achieving institutional goals (e.g., the improvement of test results) (Sarwar et al., 2022). Pardosi and Utari (2021) add that principals play a key role in improving education quality and accountability. Given the range and complexity of these leaders' responsibilities, they should undergo comprehensive leadership development to meet stakeholder expectations.

It is currently recognised that school leadership cannot be discussed without reference to leader development (Walker & Hallinger, 2013). Leadership skills, competencies, and attitudes are normally developed through leadership preparation and development.

Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a notable difference between the two, which requires clarification. Leadership preparation is a pre-service activity aimed at equipping aspiring leaders with qualifications, knowledge, and skills (Bush, 2018). According to Bush (2018), it may involve the identification of potential school leaders, targeted preparation, customised selection, and professional induction, so it can be interpreted as a longitudinal process. In turn, leadership development is a term which refers to in-service activities aimed at equipping leaders with skills to create a positive school climate, improve staff performance, strengthen teachers' and students' morale, and improve school and student performance (Kelley et al., 2005). Leadership development is a career-long process rather than a one-time activity (Bush, 2018). In this thesis, the researcher examines both leadership development and preparation as two facets of leadership building in Saudi schools.

According to Agirdag and Muijs (2023), leadership development aims to achieve sustained school improvement by empowering leaders to effectively embrace the opportunities and address the challenges in their unique school contexts. Leadership development is about ensuring positive change and looking beyond immediate school needs, which are normally reserved for school administration and management (Agirdag & Muijs, 2023). Notably, the aims and outcomes of leadership development may vary considerably, depending on the programme, and may include a leader's increased capacity to promote in-school change or the ability to improve school climate (Simkins et al., 2009). However, one should point to the lack of scholarly debates and research on the aims and intentions of school leadership development, which is a significant gap that may prevent the development of programmes that meet real-life school demands and needs (Bush, 2018).

Theories of leadership preparation have not been strong drivers of the increasing focus on school leadership development. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), most of the research on leadership is atheoretical, meaning that scholars rarely use theories to inform leadership development strategies in the educational context, as also noted by Wenner and Campbell (2017). Even the evaluations of school leadership often skip

theoretical considerations (Huber & Schneider, 2022). However, there are theories that can inform leadership development and preparation.

Socialisation and identity development are useful theories that can inform school leadership development. Crow (2006) and Crow et al. (2017) indicate that school leadership could be developed better by concentrating on developing and improving the socialisation of school leaders. This means that aspiring leaders require professional socialisation, identity change (e.g., from a teacher to a principal), and organisational socialisation (learning how to work in a specific school) (Bush, 2018; Crow, 2006). These theories emphasise an important aspect of school leadership development, which is being context-specific. These authors suggest that formal training is insufficient for becoming a truly effective school leader. The complexity of the modern educational setting means that leaders need to undergo sufficient socialisation and identity formation to fit in and fully embrace their leadership role (Forbes & Watson, 2011).

This idea was further promoted by Bush (2018), who developed a comprehensive model for leadership development in schools, focusing on the importance of induction. He argues that induction is an ongoing process which consists of six phases, including succession planning, leadership preparation, recruitment, induction, and in-service development (Bush, 2018). Bush (2018) does not believe that leadership development should be left to chance or limited to formal training. Instead, this process should be focused on extracting long-term benefits from timely identification and preparation of educators for leadership positions. Bush (2018) claims that his model may be more suitable for centralised educational systems, such as that in Saudi Arabia, as they allow for more effective and homogeneous resource management across schools.

Jensen (2022) recommended using the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) for the analysis of leadership development in schools. This theory approaches school leadership development as boundary work, which is understood as the process of specialising and collaborating across professional boundaries. He argues that leadership development occurs when educators communicate across institutions, such as schools, municipalities, and universities (Jensen, 2022). This boundary work helps aspiring and existing leaders to question their practices, engage in meaningful self-

reflection, and share expertise, all of which boosts their leadership skills and competencies (Jensen, 2022).

How leaders are prepared formally is also important, as the diversity and accessibility of options affect the quality of leadership preparation. Leadership development may occur through three modes of learning: incidental and informal, intentional non-formal, and formal (Daniëls et al., 2019). The former two are the natural consequences of everyday work, whereas the latter requires more organised professional development through lectures, courses, and workshops. Huber and Schneider (2022) identified the leading global trends in leadership preparation and development. They claim that there is a trend toward centralised planning and quality assurance of leadership development programmes but decentralised provision and implementation. Moreover, formal development is increasingly complemented by collegial support in the form of peer coaching or professional learning communities (Haiyan & Walker, 2021; Huber & Schneider, 2022). Channing (2020) adds that leadership preparation occurs through mentorship and leadership experience, which helps achieve socialisation and identity formation, as recommended by Crow (2006).

It also appears that contemporary leadership development programmes increasingly recognise the importance of experiential and contextual professional development (Daniëls et al., 2019). This shift makes sense because leadership development cannot be separated from the specific school context and authentic experiences of school environments (Wright & Da Costa, 2016). This is why formal training outside schools is currently considered only part of the leadership development journey, as the skills such programmes provide need then to be embedded in the target school setting through the transfer of knowledge (Aas, 2016; Zhang & Brundrett, 2010). Experiential development consists of engaging in leadership activities and then working on the improvement of leadership skills through feedback and self-reflection (Daniëls et al., 2019). In summary, this suggests a significant shift in leadership development theory towards more context-specific practices that allow leaders to smoothly integrate their competencies into unique school settings.

In terms of the content and theories guiding leadership development, Huber and Schneider (2022) identify the prevalence of holistic approaches, personal development, and orientation to specific school goals. The latter was also identified by Dimmock (2020) as one of the most notable trends in school leadership preparation. Leadership development methods can also be divided into cognitive theoretical modes of learning (classic lectures and self-study), cooperative and communicative process-oriented learning activities (group work), and reflexive methods (supervision and mentoring) (Huber, 2011).

There is no unanimity as to what skills and competencies should be covered in leadership development, possibly due to the complexity of this position and the numerous areas that need to be included, depending on the context. Cunningham et al. (2018) argue that contemporary leadership preparation programmes in the USA increasingly focus on teaching general leadership frameworks, leadership mindsets, and ontology and involve transformative and experiential learning practices that school leaders can then adjust to their needs. Channing (2020) argues that abilities to create a positive work environment, communicate with stakeholders, promote change, and supervise personnel are the most important leadership competencies. (Channing, 2020). However, it is important to note that these findings were obtained in the US setting and may not generalise well to other school contexts, such as Saudi Arabian schools, where leaders may have other perceptions of their roles, contributions and leadership development needs.

National Context

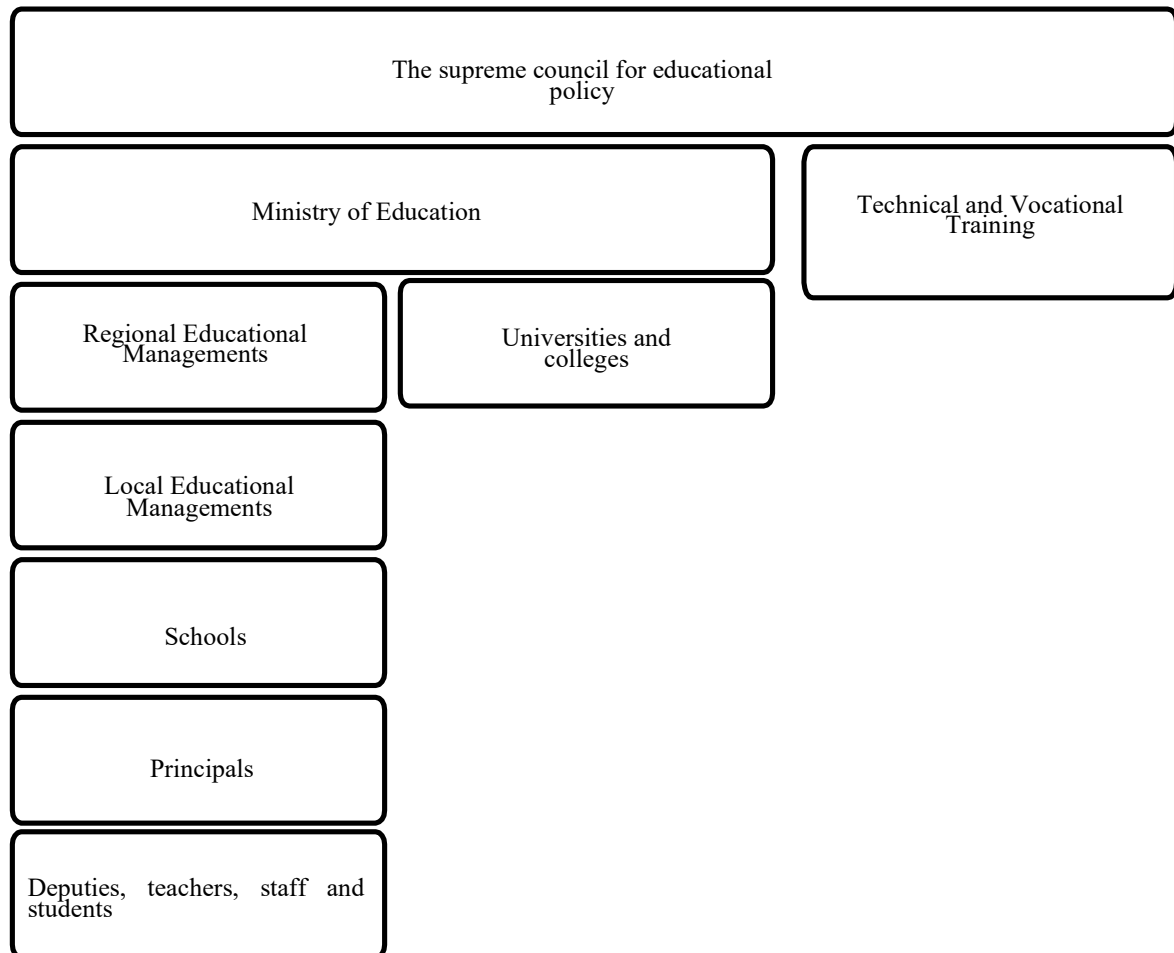
King Abdulaziz founded Knowledge Management in 1925, which later became the Ministry of Knowledge in 1953 and was retitled the Ministry of Education in 2003 (Alaqeel, 2013). In the decades following the establishment of the educational system, the country has consistently improved the quality of education, expanded its outreach, and sought to align it with international standards (Quamar, 2020). Currently, the main objective, as set by the Ministry of Education, is to develop knowledge of Islamic values and beliefs and to be able to utilise advanced technology to be globally competitive in practical sciences (Alharbi, 2024; Allmnakrah & Evers, 2019). This objective reflects the

need to readdress Saudi education policies to meet the increasing demands of the Kingdom's new economic vision (Vision 2030) (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2019). The Saudi Vision for 2030 is aimed at diversifying the economy away from dependence on an oil-based economy, recognising that various countries in the Gulf region are striving to move towards a knowledge-based economy in which education is a central component (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2019).

Saudi Vision 2030 sets some very ambitious plans for the educational sector by aiming to improve recruitment, training and development of teachers, enhancing curricula and teaching methods, developing values and core skills, and promoting creativity and innovation needed to sustain a diverse economy (Abdullateef et al., 2023). Vision 2030 also recognises the need to include in-service and pre-service teachers in educational transformations and provide them with innovative training (Almneakrah, 2020). Hence, it can be argued that the role of leadership is vital in creating a knowledge economy by acting as a catalyst and providing beneficial effects that improve both teachers' and students' teaching and learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2006). Saudi Vision 2030 also led to an increase in state investment in education. It recognised that more funds are needed to generate a knowledge economy which can deliver quality educational outcomes for Saudi students by preparing them to compete with international students globally (Al Mohsen, 2013). Spending on education has increased from 5.26% of GDP in 1990 to 7.81% in 2018 (Khayati et al, 2019). This can be compared to the USA and the UK, where educational spending is 6.1% and 6.2% respectively (OECD, 2019). The main challenge now is to use this money to restructure educational processes to achieve national goals.

There are almost 7.7 million students in Saudi Arabia, most of whom (6.7 million) attend public schools, while 1 million attend private schools (Strategic Gears, 2019). There are 26,248 public schools, comprising 86% of all schools, and 4,377 private schools (Strategic Gears, 2019). The education system in Saudi Arabia is governed by the Supreme Council for Educational Policy, which was founded in 1963 and is presided over by the ruling king (Al Mohsen, 2013). The Council's responsibility is to control all kinds of education, including compulsory and higher education, overseen by the Ministry

of Education and the Technical & Vocational Training Corporation (Ministry of Education, 2019). There are 13 educational directorates within the Ministry, each linked



to the 13 provinces of Saudi Arabia, and most of these regional groups oversee the 45 local educational groups. Each school in Saudi Arabia is connected to a local educational management group or regional management group (Ministry of Education, 2019). Figure 1.1 shows the educational hierarchy in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 1.1 Educational hierarchy in Saudi Arabia (Source: Ministry of Education, 2019)

The education system in Saudi Arabia is centralised (Alshumaimeri, 2019). The Ministry of Education is responsible for controlling and managing schools and has the primary responsibility for teachers and staff, including recruitment, allocating principals to schools, formulating the curriculum, and printing and distributing textbooks (Alharbi and Almahdi, 2012). The officials of the Ministry of Education, or the Regional Educational Managers, supervise the communication between schools and the Ministry, and they also govern schools and ensure the implementation of the Ministry's regulations (Azazi, 2012). The role of local educational authorities is similarly centralised, and schools are required to report and obtain approval before commencing any activities (Azazi, 2012). Alquraini (2011) argues that the centralised hierarchy of the Ministry of Education is a problem for educational organisations in Saudi Arabia.

The expected role of principals in this centralised educational system is also specified by the Ministry of Education (Azazi, 2012). The role of principals primarily involves setting accountability practices in schools and developing a thorough understanding of the objectives of education to arrange resources (Alhamzi, 2010). It also involves maintaining good relationships with teachers, students and their parents to ensure the curriculum is being correctly implemented. Leaders also supervise schools' performance through observations and evaluations of teachers' and students' performance and develop short and long-term targets in schools (Alhamzi, 2010). According to AlKarni (2009), these requirements lead to principals being inundated with administrative tasks and responsibilities so that their focus on developing educational leadership is limited.

There are both proponents and opponents of the centralised educational hierarchy in Saudi Arabia. The proponents claim that centralisation is an effective way to improve educational outcomes through stringent monitoring and control of educational practices, which develops better discipline among the educational institutions in Saudi Arabia (Al-Shibani, 2015). Those who oppose the centralised educational hierarchy argue that decentralisation is vital to empower teachers so they can make pertinent decisions or at least be involved in decision-making concerning curriculum design and implementation (Almudarra, 2017). Judging by the introduction of new policies designed to decentralise

the Saudi educational system (e.g., the Tatweer programme discussed below), the second opinion seems to predominate. There is a growing awareness that decentralisation helps build more coherent and academically successful organisations and empowers local school leaders to boost academic achievement (Aburizaizah et al., 2018). While the debates continue, the Saudi Arabian educational system continues to be one of the most centralised by international standards (Alshumaimeri, 2019).

Two main educational reforms illustrate Saudi Arabia's current educational system. The first reform was launched in 2007 when the Saudi government developed and subsidised a major educational reform project called the King Abdullah Bin AbdulAziz Al Saud Project for Public Education Development (KAAPPED) (Alyami, 2014). This project aimed to develop four important areas: advancing teacher skills, developing curriculum, improving extracurricular activities, and improving school environments (Alyami, 2014). The second project was aimed at establishing the Education and Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) in 2013 to evaluate, assess, and accredit K-12 schools and training organisations (ETEC, 2020). These reforms were supported by significant budgets, but the performance of Saudi students has not improved significantly (Alyami, 2014; OECD, 2018; Moshashai & Bazoobandi, 2020). For example, in TIMSS (2015), Saudi students scored below average in Maths and Science compared to other countries in the Gulf region and globally. Saudi students also obtained much lower scores in Maths and Science in PISA than their counterparts in the Gulf, and more than half did not have the reading skills required to function fully in society (OECD, 2019).

The poor performance of Saudi students is attributed to the weaknesses inherent in the Saudi educational system (Moshashai & Bazoobandi, 2020). For example, the current system of evaluation under ETEC has limited capacity, and the selection of schools for evaluation tends to focus on high-performing schools, which means that rural schools with low performance do not benefit from the support they need (OECD, 2020). Thus, ETEC can be viewed as contributing towards inequalities in the educational system, and it can also impact school leadership development (OECD, 2020). The problem is that

poor ETEC results may label some schools as failing, increasing pressure on school leaders to develop their skills and competencies to match national standards.

The absence of a national system for the assessment of learning is another significant problem (OECD, 2020). This means that teachers have no targets, and assessments do not include objective performance standards (OECD, 2020). Another concern related to the lack of performance measures is that the regular appraisal system does not adequately measure the performance of teachers. For example, the Ministry of Education staff noted that over 90% of teachers receive a better than 90% rating on their appraisals, suggesting that ratings are inflated and used as an administrative task rather than as a basis for professional growth (OECD, 2020). Allam (2020) suggests that six factors require improvement: teaching and learning, institutional resources, admission criteria, curriculum content, outcomes and assessment and pedagogy. These requirements need well-developed leaders if they are to achieve their objectives.

Institutional Context: Structure of Public Education

The focus of this study is on public schools in the city of Najran. Primary, Secondary and High school education in Saudi Arabia includes students from the ages of 6-18, and the Ministry of Education is directly responsible for providing education for these students (Alamri, 2011). The responsibility for providing education to high school students aged between 16 and 18 is shared between the Ministry of Education and the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (Alamri, 2011). Most students decide to go to high schools recommended by the Ministry of Education (Alharbi and Almahdi, 2012). The structure of education in Saudi Arabia thus comprises three levels: primary, secondary and high schools. Figure 1.2 shows the levels of public education offered in Saudi Arabia.

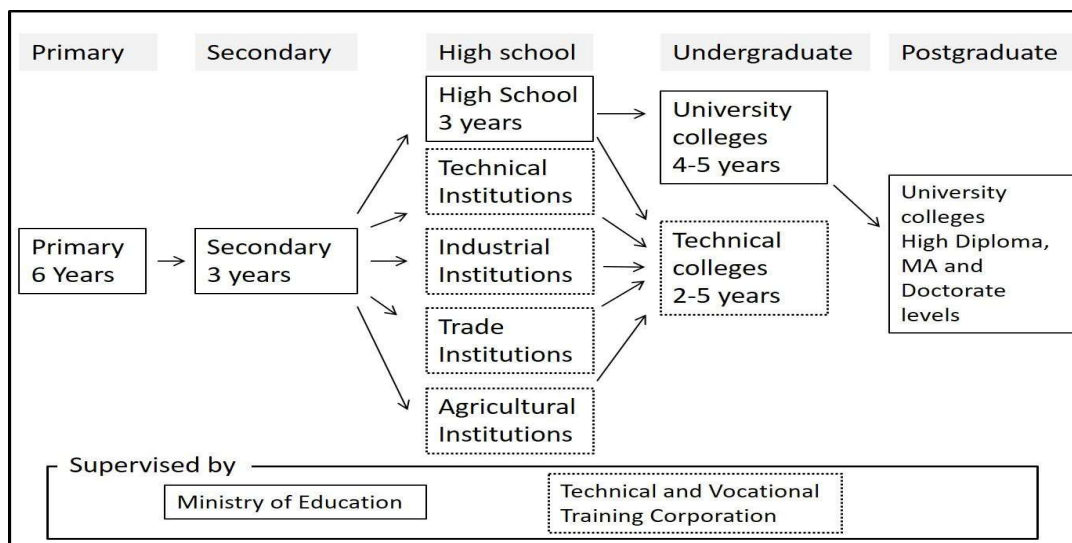


Figure 1.2 Levels of public education in Saudi Arabia (Source: Ministry of Education, 2019)

Figure 1.2 shows that the public education system in Saudi Arabia covers 12 years in total: six years of primary, three years of secondary, and three years of high school education (Ministry of Education, 2019). It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to ensure that all students have access to free education from primary to high school education, and the Ministry also mandates that all children should be admitted to primary school by the age of six (Alquraini, 2011).

Schooling is gendered in Saudi Arabia, with separate schools for girls and boys, except for pre-school education and lower primary schools, where boys and girls are integrated (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Students are taught by same-gender teachers in same-gender schools (Alharbi, 2014). Until 2013, the Ministry of Education was only responsible for boys' education and, to comply with the religious and social norms in Saudi Arabia, the responsibility for female education was carried out solely by the General Presidency of Girls' Education (GPGE) (Ministry of Education, 2019). The GPGE's objective was to ensure that Saudi females have access to public education and that its processes match Saudi religious beliefs and norms (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The first public school for girls was established in Saudi Arabia in 1960. Saudi Arabia was the first Muslim country to have a distinct female education policy involving separate management and physical provision (AlMedlij, 2018). However, since 2003, the Ministry of Education has taken responsibility for providing girls' education, and the GPGE ceased to exist in 2003 (AlMedlij, 2018). In spite of the gendered nature of education, the enrolment of boys and girls in primary schools is nearly equal and in 2015, the enrolment of girls in primary schools exceeded that of boys by 3.22% (UNESCO, 2017).

The Ministry of Education has been committed to eradicating adult illiteracy. In the past decade, it opened adult education centres across the country, developed neighbourhood learning programmes, and launched educational and literacy campaigns in remote areas where the literacy level is low (Bell, 2018). These extensive efforts arise from the Ministry of Education's vision to provide education to all individuals, irrespective of age, and literacy rates reached 97% (males) and 91.1% (females) by 2017 (The World Factbook, 2017). By 2021, the literacy rate had reached 99.38%, which indicated the success of the literacy policy (Global Data, 2023).

Geographical Context and Political, Economic and Cultural Factors

Political, social, economic and geographical factors all influence education in Saudi Arabia (Al Mohsen, 2013). Politics has a vital impact on education since Saudi Arabia is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and utilises political pressure within the Islamic and Arab world. Education is seen as vital to enhance a sense of belonging among students so that they understand the importance of unity and cooperation in the Islamic world (Azazi, 2012). It is also an important tool for national identity formation, which helps instil values needed to maintain political sustainability and the long-term development of the country (Alharbi, 2017).

Social factors, such as language, culture, and religion, also affect the educational policies of public schools (Alharbi and Almahdi, 2012). Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia; all textbooks are printed in Arabic, and the supremacy of the Arabic language in the curriculum is one of the main priorities of educational policymakers (Alnahdi, 2014). Educational policies are also affected by social factors, as education is

perceived as a key to the much-needed social empowerment, narrowing of social gaps, and creation of social coherence (Singh et al., 2022). The economic factors which affect the educational context of public schools are the abundance of petroleum resources in Saudi Arabia, leading to increased investment in education by the Ministry of Education (Alnahdi, 2014), including investment in leadership development. The most notable feature of educational policy is that education is free from primary school until the postgraduate and doctoral levels. Students also receive monthly bursaries from the government to cover their living expenses at the university level (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The geographical factors affecting the educational context of public schools are the hot and barren climate. Communities and education are divided into three categories: industrial, agricultural and desert dwellers, based on the geographical location of the inhabitants (Alaqeel, 2013). Educating the students in deserts is a serious challenge for the Ministry of Education, not only due to the weather but also because of the high illiteracy rate among the parents of these students (Alaqeel, 2013). These factors inevitably affect leadership development, as it does not exist in isolation from the broader socioeconomic, political, linguistic, and cultural processes.

Hammad and Shah (2018) revealed some interesting insights into factors that affect school leaders' work. The researchers examined the experiences of leaders in Saudi international schools. They found that they suffer from the dissonance between the liberal approaches to education prevalent in their schools and the conservative values and culture prevalent in Saudi educational institutions. Issues such as Saudisation, gender segregation, and parental expectations were found to significantly affect leaders' work and experiences (Hammad & Shah, 2018). Although this study concerns international schools only, its findings may be generalised to all public schools because of the cultural similarities. Cultural factors, such as gender relations, worldviews, and expectations placed on leaders in Saudi Arabia, all shape leadership experiences.

Presentation of the Study Context

The geographical context of the study will be the city of Najran, Saudi Arabia, due to my position as a former school leader in this city. I had the opportunity to participate in

some of the leadership programmes that the Ministry of Education conducted for teachers and principals. During this training, I had the opportunity to get to know some of the trainees in the Ministry of Education, who subsequently connected me with the people who are responsible for leadership preparation programmes in Saudi Arabia. My interest in studying leadership preparation in Najran, Saudi Arabia, was also spurred by the absence of scholarly studies exploring school leadership in a context very different from that of Riyadh.

Situated in the southwestern region of Saudi Arabia, Najran City spans approximately 885 km² and comprises 78 residential districts. As of 2019, the city's population reached more than 450,000. In 2017, the city hosted 332 schools, which educated a student population of 77,891. Najran City boasts 169 boys' schools across various stages of education, along with 163 girls' schools (AlQuhtani, 2023). Primary schools have a clustered distribution pattern, with most schools being concentrated in established and fully developed districts, mostly situated near the city centre (AlQuhtani, 2023, b). The literature on school leadership in Najran is limited; there is no comprehensive evaluation of school leadership preparation initiatives in the city (Wahsheh, 2023), providing the warrant for this research.

The focus of this research is on secondary public schools for boys because this fits with my own professional experience. Having worked in this educational setting, I possess a good understanding of its unique demands, policy frameworks, workforce requirements, and, more importantly, leadership challenges. The Saudi education system is gender-segregated and the associated culture means that I was unable to consider researching in girls' schools. While the number of international schools in Saudi Arabia has grown significantly in the past decade, they represent a small fraction of all the schools in Najran, and such schools rarely participate in formal leadership development initiatives, so they were excluded from the study.

School Leadership in Saudi Arabia

Specific policies concerning school leadership in Saudi Arabia have been introduced. The Ministry of Education adopted various strategies to support and develop school

leadership, including the development of the administrative system and professional standards for educational leaders to upgrade their skills and competencies (AlFagih & Kariri, 2022). Similarly, the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) seeks to prepare well-qualified educational leaders able to meet the highest standards (AlFagih & Kariri, 2022). These initiatives suggest a policy focus on building school leadership (ETEC, 2020). However, research shows that a very small proportion of educators appointed as leaders undergo official leadership training. Moreover, fewer than 20% of leaders dedicate sufficient time to leadership activities and meetings (ETEC, 2020), and training is not a prerequisite for appointment as a principal. This suggests that there is still much room for development in respect of training effective leaders to fully embrace their leadership roles and commit to their leadership mission.

The Education & Training Evaluation Commission's (ETEC's) new framework offers an opportunity to reconsider accountability in Saudi Arabia, which may mean that a limited set of school evaluation indicators and better practice descriptions should be developed to complement school evaluation standards (OECD, 2020). An example of this is the ETEC's new principal standards. To ensure their success, both pre-service and in-service training should be reinforced (OECD, 2020). Another suggestion to ensure the success of ETEC's new principal standards is to launch scholarship programmes for educational leadership with competitive entry requirements to provide training for the most qualified aspirant principals (OECD, 2020).

The role of the National Institute for Professional Educational Development (NIPED) is also important in developing school leadership in Saudi Arabia. For example, NIPED's plans to supervise the quality of local training provision, expand more professional resources, and endorse private training programmes offer the potential to considerably develop both the significance and scope of professional development for principals (OECD, 2020). These plans have implications for this research and indicate a need to interview providers from the local training centre.

King Abdullah's Education Development Project, also referred to as the Tatweer Project is one of the most important steps towards modernising and improving school leadership in Saudi Arabia. Launched from 2007-2013, the reform aims to empower the provinces by developing province-wide development plans (Al-Essa, 2010). It also aims to ensure that all students of public education are equipped with the essential skills to contribute towards a progressively globalised society and to engage with the intricate and numerous challenges which globalisation generates while preserving the principles and beliefs underpinning Saudi society (Al-Essa, 2010). The reform is seen as an attempt to introduce a less centralised system, which might then provide the potential for leadership development with greater autonomy for those leaders.

The Tatweer programme marks a distinct policy orientation toward decentralisation and leadership development and demonstrates growing policy recognition of the importance of leadership in quality education. The Tatweer programme seeks to provide professional development for educational leaders, managers, and all school staff (Meemar, 2018). The introduction of a new school leadership structure is designed to aid in this mission (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). Specifically, Tatweer recommends forming so-called "Excellence Teams," which consist of the school community and external community members who are expected to work collaboratively to set individual targets and define the unique mission and vision for each school (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). The programme was also designed to allow for more shared and distributed day-to-day leadership in schools (Alyami & Floyd, 2019).

While the programme was intended to improve the state of school leadership in Saudi Arabia, evidence suggests that its outcomes have been moderate. Much criticism has been voiced regarding the position of teachers and school administration, which has not changed significantly since the introduction of Tatweer (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2018). Allmnakrah and Evers (2019) praise Tatweer's objectives and perspectives but show that many years after its introduction, little evidence has been collected showing improvement in the Saudi education system. Allmnakrah and Evers (2019) suggest that policymakers' inability to involve educators in the process of programme development

has been one of the main reasons for the lack of significant progress. However, in contrast, Alyami and Floyd (2019) found some major breakthroughs in distributing leadership and decision-making responsibilities in female-led schools in Saudi Arabia. This discrepancy in findings may be due to local and school-level variations in Tatweer implementation.

The Saudi Ministry of Education also launched the *Khbrat* (translated from Arabic as 'experiences') programme for school leader development (Bentahar et al., 2021). The goal of this initiative, introduced as part of Vision 2030, is to change teachers' mindsets and empower them to serve as transformational agents in Saudi schools. Leadership development envisaged by *Khbrat* is achieved through immersive experiences in U.S. K-12 schools for one year (Bentahar et al., 2021). Drawing on the existing theory of leadership development discussed in the previous sections, it is possible to suggest that the Ministry of Education embraces the trend towards more experiential and context-based leadership preparation (Daniëls et al., 2019). The results have been promising, but there is not enough research to evaluate the long-term contribution of the programme for leadership development in Saudi schools.

Within the context of Saudi Arabia, leadership continues to face various challenges, reflecting deep-seated problems in the educational system (Alquraini, 2011). These include the prevalent culture and norms in schools, hierarchical decision-making, rigid organisational structures, and lack of involvement of teachers in decision-making (Al-Rasheed, 2013). According to Algarni and Male (2015), leadership in Saudi schools is seen as the responsibility of one individual. They add that this implies maintenance rather than development and management rather than leadership (Algarni & Male, 2015). Leadership development within the context of Saudi schools requires changing the organisational culture in terms of teaching and learning and providing greater autonomy for educational leaders to develop pedagogical leadership (Palaiologou et al., 2015).

The centralised nature of educational governance in Saudi Arabia also creates barriers to effective school leadership. The Saudi Arabian educational system is highly

centralised and bureaucratic, and school leaders have limited autonomy and few incentives to develop themselves or their practice (Alghamdi & Abdullgawad, 2002). According to Alsalih (2010), a related problem in Saudi schools is the imbalance between the principals' responsibility to facilitate decentralisation and their limited authority, which has developed a sense of dissatisfaction among school principals.

Finally, it is important to mention some evidence on how stakeholders, including principals and teachers, evaluate the state of leadership development in Saudi schools. Recent research conducted in the Jazan region found that school leaders lacked organisational support from educational administrators (Alharbi, 2021). They also pointed to the ineffectiveness of the training programmes for school leaders, particularly those related to organisational learning skills (Alharbi, 2021). A more recent study conducted among primary and secondary special education teachers in Saudi Arabia revealed that they have a limited understanding of the concept of leadership (Alnasser, 2023). Barriers to taking on more leadership opportunities identified in this study included the lack of incentives and opportunities, insufficient professional development, teacher resistance, and toxic school culture (Alnasser, 2023).

Similar challenges were reported by Alowin (2020), who collected data from participants across the country who worked in secondary schools for girls. According to Alowin (2020), leadership development in schools was stifled by the lack of staff autonomy from the Ministry of Education, insufficient leadership training programmes and the lack of career opportunities for advancing leadership growth. Research from different parts of the country thus shows some common drawbacks of school leadership development programmes, which lack standardisation, growth opportunities and a culture of excellence (Alharbi, 2021; Alnasser, 2023; Alowin, 2020). However, rural schools seem to be particularly vulnerable, having the biggest gaps in leadership preparation (Alotaibi, 2023). These findings demonstrate the school leadership and practice gaps that existing policies have not yet addressed.

Research Aim

The purpose of this study is to explore the content and process of school leadership development from policymaker and participant perspectives. The study aims not only to

understand how school leaders are developed but also to examine the role of socialisation and networking, and to identify the barriers to effective leadership development programmes.

Research Questions

In order to design research questions for this study, the researcher has used Crow's (2006) and Crow et al.'s (2017) socialisation and identity model as a theoretical framework. The justification for using this model is that it provides a distinction between anticipatory, professional, personal and organisational socialisation. In addition, it could be argued that by concentrating on developing and improving the socialisation and identity of school leaders, school leadership could be developed. Using socialisation and identity as a combined theoretical model would shed light on the process component, i.e., the delivery of leadership development programmes. There are five research questions:

Research Question 1: How are leaders of boys' secondary schools developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

The purpose of this question is to identify the different means and channels through which school leadership is being developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia. This research question is investigated through consideration of the leadership development programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education in Najran, as well as the role of the Leadership Committee in promoting best practices. Addressing this research question also necessitates an examination of the exchange programmes conducted by the Ministry to examine their role in facilitating collaboration, networking and the exchange of ideas between junior and senior teachers across different schools and internationally.

There are also various small-scale structured and unstructured initiatives conducted within the schools themselves, and this study examines how those initiatives have provided new opportunities for practising leadership. By addressing this research question, the researcher wants to explore the scope of these school-based initiatives for leadership development and what opportunities for learning those initiatives have provided to those who participated in them. A focus on school-led initiatives for

leadership development also provides insights into the cross-school differences while also highlighting successful interventions and those which fell short of expectations.

Self-development is also an important aspect of teachers' and principals' development. Self-development links to Crow's (2006) notion of anticipatory socialisation as individuals prioritise their self-development if they envision themselves as future school leaders. This notion of anticipatory socialisation can be useful in understanding the development of school leaders in Najran, as it can be argued that most aspirant school leaders have been teachers who understand the deficiencies of the formal training offered to both teachers and principals and sought new paths to become prepared for the roles they want to assume.

The focus of the project was put on boys schools as the researcher perceived that gender and cultural barriers in the Saudi society will prevent the researcher from obtaining full access to female-only schools.

Research question 2: What are policymakers' and participants' perspectives on school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

Most of the existing research on leadership development in Saudi Arabia is narrowly constructed to capture the perspectives of a small group of stakeholders, mostly the principals of Saudi schools (AlKarni, 2009, Alhuzaim et al., 2022; Meemar, 2014). In contrast, the present research recognises that a diverse pool of stakeholders is engaged in leadership development practice in Saudi Arabia, and their perspectives should be examined closely, and also juxtaposed and contrasted to reveal different perceptions of the state of leadership preparation in Najran.

The rationale for obtaining participants' (junior teachers, senior teachers and principals) perspectives is to identify what programmes and initiatives are available to advance the leadership development agenda in schools and how participants use and perceive those opportunities. As there are limited initiatives for the formal development of leaders in schools in Saudi Arabia, the participants could provide insights on both formal and informal initiatives, focusing on those that they have experienced. Examining participants' perspectives on leadership development in the more informal school setting

may also provide insights that might not have been reflected in traditional post-training feedback surveys.

Policymakers' perspectives are rarely considered by school leadership research even though the Ministry of Education in many countries (including Saudi Arabia) is the primary actor who develops the leadership development curricula and conducts leadership training (Al-Abdullatif, 2019; Almudarra, 2017). Capturing policy-making perspectives is important for this study for two main reasons. First, policymakers and training managers are responsible for designing programmes and interventions for leadership development and are cognisant of the peculiar challenges of promoting leadership training in Najran. Second, policymakers and training managers are familiar with programmes and initiatives that might not be known by teachers and can provide an account of what the Ministry of Education is currently doing to prepare educational leaders.

To answer this research question would also require examining to what extent the Ministry of Education has invested in leadership and soft-skills training. By addressing this research question, the researcher seeks to identify the main limitations of the current initiatives for leadership training, as perceived by both policymakers and participants.

Research Question 3: How have networking and socialisation among teachers influenced leadership development?

This research question is closely linked with Crow's (2006), and Crow et al.'s (2017), socialisation and identity model, which is used as a main theoretical framework for this study. This research question also addresses the important informal role of peer networking and socialisation in driving the interest towards leadership development and capacity building. By posing this research question, the researcher aims to obtain participants' perspectives on the extent to which training programmes contribute to enhanced socialisation and networking.

Socialisation can take different forms, but of particular relevance to this study are anticipatory socialisation, professional socialisation and organisational socialisation. To

examine how anticipatory socialisation influenced the leadership development practice, the research examines how, if at all, the participants changed their behaviour in anticipation of being given a leadership position. The analysis explores the perceived training needs of the junior and senior teachers and how they have attempted to address the gaps in their leadership training. The question also seeks to examine how anticipatory socialisation played out in the four studied schools and what factors influenced cross-school differences, especially in the schools where people were not involved in the Ministry-led leadership development training.

Professional socialisation encompasses the practices and behaviours that are required to be effective leaders. The study examines how the different training, development and exchange programmes impacted upon the professional socialisation of the participants and how they perceive the training and development initiatives they have experienced. .

To identify how organisational socialisation linked to leadership development, the researcher examines specific school-led initiatives for leadership development and what their impact was on the networking and socialisation of those who participated in them. The role of organisational socialisation is likely to vary significantly between and across the different schools, and it is important to examine why some schools succeed in fostering organisational socialisation and what are the barriers faced by teachers in other schools.

Research Question 4: How does the Tatweer Programme influence leadership development practices in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

This study also explores participants' and policymakers' perspectives about the role of the Tatweer programme in supporting leadership development, empowering teachers, and promoting the autonomy and independence of school leaders. The Tatweer programme is supposed to fundamentally transform the Saudi educational system by facilitating the adoption of decentralised governance models and by providing teachers with opportunities for personal development that are not otherwise available. The research question also addresses whether, and to what extent, the training conducted within the Tatweer programme facilitates the skills and capacity development of

teachers. The researcher has selected schools that have participated in the programme and those that remained outside it (see chapter three). This case selection enables the researcher to compare and contrast the experiences of participants in both Tatweer and non-Tatweer schools and to examine whether the Tatweer programme creates a two-tier education system by reducing the opportunities for professional development available to teachers in non-Tatweer schools.

While the development of the Tatweer programme could be used as evidence that the Saudi Ministry of Education wants to develop leadership potential in schools, the implementation of the programme has been controversial. To address this research question, the researcher has examined the selection process of schools taking part in the Tatweer programme, and whether teachers and principals are adequately informed about the leadership development component of Tatweer.

Research Question 5: What are the barriers facing leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia

The last research question highlights the barriers that participants and policymakers face in creating an agenda for and participating in school leadership development. The answer to this research question requires understanding the personal factors that explain the lack of interest in leadership development as well as the job-specific barriers (such as job demands, administrative hurdles, and job-related stress) that may inhibit teachers from becoming school leaders. In exploring the barriers leadership development is facing, the researcher also addresses the institutional barriers that may have prevented the Ministry of Education from developing a comprehensive framework for advancing leadership development practice in schools. In doing so, the researcher examines whether the Ministry of Education provides sufficient institutional support to those seeking to develop their leadership potential.

Overview

The aim of this chapter was to present the context of the study. Theoretical context is given to outline the current frameworks for analysing, planning, and delivering leadership development in schools. The chapter also outlines the differences between

leadership development and preparation and considers the aims of leadership development in the educational context. In addition, a critical review of the existing theoretical models and frameworks is included to explain how leadership development is currently conceptualised and how it may affect the delivery of formal and informal training. Specific attention is paid to socialisation and identity development theory, which underpins the study. The national, institutional, political, geographical, economic, and policy contexts are also discussed, allowing for a better understanding of the Saudi educational system and the importance of school leadership development. The chapter pays specific attention to the factors that shape leadership aims, experiences, and challenges in Saudi Arabian schools. An overview of the programmes provided to aspiring school leaders in Saudi Arabia helps to frame leadership development opportunities and the gaps in leader preparation. Finally, the chapter discusses the research aims and questions, to provide the direction for the enquiry. The next chapter is the literature review.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter comprises the literature review for this study. It is divided into four major parts. These cover the concepts of leadership development, a review of international research, a review of the literature on leadership development in Gulf countries, and in Saudi Arabia specifically. The literature search was conducted using scholarly databases, such as JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science, and others. Search terms included “leadership development,” “leadership preparation,” “leadership training,” “leadership coaching,” “leadership mentoring,” “leadership identity,” and “leadership socialisation.” The researcher also used Boolean operators OR and AND to find studies from the USA, the UK, and the Gulf states. Specifically, the researcher combined the search terms with the names of the countries in question using these operators to narrow down the search to the most relevant studies. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles published in the past 15 years to capture relatively recent research. In addition, the review includes official reports and government data as an adjunct to academic literature in Saudi Arabia. Sources in both Arabic and English were examined to expand the scope of the reviewed literature. Student papers, anonymous articles, and grey literature were excluded from the review. Studies conducted earlier than 15 years ago (except for the seminal research or studies providing a wider historical context) were excluded.

The first part of this review examines definitions and concepts of leadership development. Subsequently, important relevant theories are explored, notably socialisation and identity. The final three sections present and assess empirical research in selected countries. Literature from the United States was analysed because this country is one of the major sources of research on school leadership. It was also one of the first countries to introduce school leadership preparation. Given the researcher’s current context, it seemed appropriate also to examine UK-based literature.

This international research provides a basis to compare with the literature from the Gulf countries, which is the focus of the next section. The inclusion of the United Arab

Emirates, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait, as well as Saudi Arabia, is justified because these five Gulf countries have much in common in terms of their political systems, language, culture, religion, economy, and centralised educational systems. The review of the literature from these states helps to identify broader patterns of school leadership development in the region, as well as some important particularities for each state that may help the researcher to better understand the context of leadership preparation and development in Saudi Arabia.

Defining Leadership Development

Although leadership development is recognised as essential, in some settings, for school leaders to carry out their demanding responsibilities successfully (Bush, 2020), there is uncertainty about its meaning (Jensen, 2016). Nakpodia (2012) understands this term as the expansion of an educational professional's capacity to be effective in leadership processes and roles. Similarly, Peretomode (2012) defines it as the development of leadership abilities and attitudes that increase the effectiveness of leadership within an organisation. While it is recognised that school leadership development should target leaders' individualised needs and aspirations (Bush, 2008), there is also realisation of the importance of specific challenges in the school context that determine the nature and scope of leadership development (Moorosi & Bush, 2011).

According to Jensen (2016), there is misunderstanding surrounding the term 'leadership development' for school principals. It may refer to the preparation of aspiring leaders, further development of experienced school leaders, or both (Jensen, 2016). The term should be differentiated from the notion of professional development, which often refers to advancing teachers' skills, knowledge, and expertise (Chalikias et al., 2020; Hammad, 2016). Jensen (2022) suggests looking at the concept as a process of collaboration across institutions. They refer to it as 'boundary work' and argue that it engages schools, universities, and district offices (Jensen, 2022). This conceptualisation of the term is quite unusual, given the focus on specific school settings that can be generally observed across studies dedicated to school leadership development. However, it deserves attention as it suggests an unconventional approach

to leadership development that engages a wider set of actors. Yokota (2021) points to the limitations of principals' leadership development practices that might be caused by the lack of understanding of what leadership development is and how it should be pursued. However, more research on this issue is needed to explore this view.

Dalakoura (2010) claims that the concepts of "leader" and "leadership development" are used interchangeably in the literature with no visible distinction being made between them. He adds that this may explain why there is inadequacy in differentiating leader development from leadership development. Another reason for the limited differentiation between these two concepts is that most of the earlier practical studies of leadership evaluated it mainly as an individual phenomenon, concentrating on the behaviours and skills of the leader (Day, 2001). Hence, leadership was anticipated to occur mostly as a result of providing individual training for leaders and in developing their skills and capabilities (Day, 2001).

There is an important view that leadership is not only an individual activity, but rather a complex phenomenon which involves collaboration between the leader and the social and organisational environment (Bush & Glover, 2012; Jensen, 2022; Osborn et al., 2002; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Waldman et al., 2004). Leadership development is thus regarded as a social process which involves all individuals in the organisation, with a particular focus placed on the development of interactions between people, to add value to the organisation (Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Becker & Huselid, 2006). Karami-Akkary and Hammad (2019) recognise that leadership development is a continuum going beyond initial professional preparation to encompass in-service training and induction programmes. They also explain that the term 'leadership development' has evolved over the past decades. Initially, it was perceived as a process of preparing educators to assume formal leadership roles in educational institutions, primarily concerned with efforts made prior to the appointment. More recently, leadership development is perceived as a continuum that encompasses initial training, various induction programmes, and ongoing, in-service professional development (Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). It is increasingly recognised that it is not enough for aspiring school leaders to possess a teaching qualification and teaching experience –

they have a moral obligation to undergo systematic, context-specific, and ongoing professional development as leaders (Bush, 2018). Thus, it is possible to suggest that the existing conceptualisation of leadership development recognises that leadership skills and capabilities can be learned across different stages of leadership growth and different settings (Volante, 2012).

The nuances of terminology lead to another important research concern: about how leadership development in the school context should be pursued. For example, Bush and Glover (2004) offered certain notions to be addressed whilst providing leadership development. They and others argue that leadership development should be based strongly on participants' leadership contexts, which means that the starting point for leadership learning should be their own schools (Bush & Glover, 2004; King & Bouchard, 2011; Rhodes & Brundett, 2009).

Thomson (2009) states that leadership development can be best achieved by developing pre-service and in-service leadership development programmes which may help the principals to manage the stress linked to their role. Şenol (2019) notes that leadership development should be highly individualised, with different approaches customised to meet participants' needs. According to Şenol (2019), training activities related to school culture, human capital, executive leadership, strategic operations, supervisor support, and building relationships with peers, should be part of school principals' leadership development.

Conceptually, principals' leadership development can be rooted in the theoretical framework of executive development and adult learning theory (Davis et al., 2005; Kim, 2018). However, Davis et al (2005) argue that lack of a coherent theoretical and research base leads to a lack of consistency, meaning that different countries, and even educational institutions, have to experiment with various combinations of methods, curricula, and programme structures to develop effective leaders. Such variation is inevitable, though, to reflect the needs of different educational settings. Wenner and Campbell (2017) argue that leadership development in the school context lacks a sound empirical and theoretical basis.

It is also important to make a distinction between leadership preparation, leadership learning, leadership training and leadership development, which is the focus of next sub-section. The problem is that these terms are often used interchangeably, which creates confusion (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). A more accurate differentiation between the terms, could help inform the development of more targeted, meaningful, and effective educational interventions.

Comparing Different Terminology: Preparation, Learning, Training and Development

It may appear that leadership preparation, development, learning, and training are very similar terms, building school leaders who are able to meet stakeholders' expectations. However, there are important nuances of meaning within each term, which are discussed below.

Leadership preparation

Huber (2004) links the case for leadership preparation to the evidence that enhanced leadership is essential for school improvement and student outcomes. Bush (2018) expands on his argument by adding that the role of a principal is different from classroom teaching and needs specific preparation. Crow (2006) associates leadership preparation with types of socialisations, or learning a new responsibility, and this involves professional preparation, to take up a role such as principal, and organisational preparation, which concentrates on the particular context where the role is being accomplished. It is also important to add that leadership preparation is a pre-service activity targeted at aspiring leaders (Eadens & Ceballos, 2022). It seeks to identify potential leaders and help them to embrace leadership opportunities once they enter the profession. It can also focus on one specific social issue or school demand, as shown in a study by Maloney and Garver (2020) dedicated to equity-oriented leadership preparation programmes.

Leadership training

A defining feature of school leadership training is the idea of transmitting a specific body of knowledge, skills and competencies. It is a fixed process leading to an intended fixed

outcome limited in scope and time, with outcomes defined by the trainer, not the learner. Van Veelen et al. (2017) explain that leadership training is a problem-based approach aimed at helping school leaders to deal with complexity and change. For example, a study by Letuma et al. (2023) shows that leadership training should encompass the delivery of knowledge and skills related to the use of advanced technology. Another example is provided by Sebastien (2017), who points to the need for ethical leadership training for school leaders. Leadership training is often delivered within fixed training programmes in centralised educational systems to ensure that school leaders can implement educational policies.

Leadership training may also have characteristics and elements that overlap with those in leadership preparation and development. For example, it involves providing and receiving training and this may involve the use of mentoring, coaching, action-learning projects, and actual scenario-based situations as relevant training methods for mid-level managers (Gregory et al, 2016; Thessin, 2019). According to Yuliana et al. (2022), leadership training covers the areas of management, direction, and teacher empowerment. It is also closely related to issues directly affecting the learning process, such as curriculum, teaching and learning processes, assessment, teacher development, and the creation of learning communities (Yuliana et al., 2022). Giraldo-García and Orozko (2022) add that leadership training is inherently transformative, meaning that it challenges leaders' preconceived notions and fosters a shift in their perceptions of how schools should be governed. However, this latter view cannot be easily generalised to all educational systems, particularly highly centralised ones, where the main goal of training is to ensure that leaders perform consistently with the hierarchy and to meet set expectations.

Mole (2000) specifies that leadership training concentrates on employees' present job. This highlights the view that training should be located in the current context and involve previous and current experiences, for example as a middle manager, as individuals must do the job to know the job (Pettitt, 1999). Thus, training is often (but not necessarily) specific to the context in which it takes place and involves experiential learning, including the basic attribute of problem-solving (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

The idea of context-based leadership training is reiterated in education-related research, for example by Brauckmann et al. (2023). Jerdborg (2021), focusing on the outcomes of the Swedish National Principal Training Programme, found that school leaders need a greater immersion into their school contexts to take advantage of reflective thinking, and questioning facilitated through such programmes.

Leadership learning

Van Veelen et al. (2017) define leadership learning as a “nonformal learning activity that takes place in the school and that continues during the entire career” (p. 370). Unlike leadership training, learning is voluntary, occurs on the job, and is inherently reflective in nature. Another distinctive feature of leadership learning that differentiates it from training is that it is a wider concept that allows for the opportunity for self-development and the individual determination of the scope of on-the-job learning (van Veelen et al., 2017). Leadership learning is both a conscious and subconscious process, and occurs through life, professional prospects and experiences (Cliffe, 2016). Leadership learning transpires both through the experiences as teachers and principals and involves learning about leading and performing leadership through a range of educational obligations (Brundrett, 2001). Sapsed (2018) also argues that leadership learning is not restricted only to teachers or principals, but rather it is an activity which can be exercised by anyone, regardless of status. This notion of leadership learning reinforces the concept that leadership attributes can be acquired by any individual (Avolio, 2005). Finally, leadership learning can occur on individual and social levels. The former is carried out individually as school leaders reflect on their activities, values, and abilities, whereas the latter happens through social activities within work groups (van Veelen et al., 2017).

Leadership development

Leadership development is a more comprehensive concept. Bush and Glover (2004) suggest that leadership development ranges from the particular, systemic, closely instructional and dominant model to the relative, empowering, organisationally articulate and transformational model. To many scholars, it is mainly perceived to deal with the ways in which attitudes are nurtured, actions are enabled, and the learning organisation

is encouraged in the in-service setting (Alexandrou, & Swaffield, 2016; Daniëls et al., 2019; Frost & Durrant, 2000). Kasapoğlu (2020), and Korkut and Llací (2016), add that leadership development can also be viewed from the perspective of self-development, which complements formal and informal efforts and is aligned with the idea of self-leadership (Warren, 2021). However, some scholars narrow down the focus of leadership development to the context of school culture and climate. For example, Kelley et al. (2005) suggest that leadership development is about developing a positive school climate and it involves developing practices which can improve staff performance, enhance both teachers' and pupils' morale and develop pupils' achievements, linked to school improvement initiatives. Similarly, Whitaker (2012), and Barth (2002) highlight the importance of leadership development by arguing that it is instrumental in improving a school's culture and the role of principal is vital in setting an optimistic tone which can positively influence the actions of all individuals in the school.

It is also important to acknowledge critical perspectives on leadership development as it may not always produce positive impacts, given the mixed findings from prior research. For example, Sieser and Söderström (2022) evaluated the effects of the school leaders' training programme in Sweden and found that principals did not use the insights gained during the programme to address context-specific school problems and conflicts. This lack of positive impact might be due to the programme's failure to promote principals' reflection, awareness and responsibility (Sieser & Söderström, 2022). While these results are discouraging, they should not be generalised to other principal development programmes that vary considerably in terms of content and focus.

In contrast, a study by Steinberg and Yang (2021) points to numerous benefits of principal leadership development, providing sound justification for its use across different educational settings. They evaluated the effects of a Pennsylvania's Inspired Leadership (PIL) induction programme developed for newly hired principals and found that it positively affected teacher effectiveness and student maths achievement. Agirdag and Mujis (2023) confirm that academic achievement may indeed improve significantly through leadership development. Assessments of subjective perceptions of the

effectiveness of principal training also demonstrate that these are considered to be effective (Abdel-Hameed et al., 2021).

Leithwood and Levin (2004) offer a model linking leadership development to student outcomes and suggest that a common strategy in leadership research is to evaluate schools on the basis of student outcomes, then determine what leaders do, but it may be better to develop a design which compares exceptionally high versus low scoring schools. However, Leithwood and Levin (2004) argue that these designs are of no value for programme evaluation purposes as one cannot select leaders and schools for evaluation, rather it is the programme itself which selects the leaders and schools. Thus, evaluations of these leadership development programmes may result in neutral or negative impacts. It is also important to link the concept of leadership development to notions of socialisation and identity, which are discussed in the next sections.

Bush and Glover's (2012) evaluation of South Africa's qualification for aspiring principals, called The Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE), shows that many schools with at least one ACE graduate were able to improve their school leaving (matric) pass rates faster than other schools between 2008-2010, especially where there was good collaboration between the principal, the School Management Teams (SMTs) and educators. Bush and Glover (2012) note that targeted specialist training improves learning outcomes in many participating schools. There is no straightforward association between the ACE programme and improved learning outcomes, but schools can still benefit from the ACE programme which leads to school improvement in many cases. Hence, Bush and Glover (2012) suggest that such positive outcomes from leadership development could be achieved in other countries.

Identity

Leadership development is closely linked to the notion of leadership identity. According to the US-based research by Hallinger and Heck (2010), pre-service preparatory programmes for developing school leaders are inadequate in terms of professional socialisation and the resultant identity development of a change-oriented school leader. Thus, Brody et al (2010) argue that it is important to understand what exactly is meant by leadership development. For example, one possible definition of leadership

development is that it addresses issues of identity and socialisation for educational leaders, including principals (Brody et al., 2010). Crow et al. (2017) provides a definition of leadership development, connected to identity:

“What makes school principals successful educational researchers have found that their sense of identity as educators with strong moral purposes is a critical antecedent and co-requisite of their capacity for effective practices and closely associated with their professional identities” (p.1).

This definition highlights the importance of developing a professional identity to develop leadership effectiveness. Hallinger & Heck (2010) also argue that leadership development needs to address issues related to identity and socialisation:

“Developing a role-based identity with values, norms, and symbols that may span many organisations within or across multiple fields. This type of socialisation facilitates acquisition of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to fulfil the duties of this role” (Brody et al., 2010: p.615).

Thus, leadership development is about developing both the professional identity and the professional socialisation of principals.

Exploring how school principals construct their professional leadership identities is crucial to understanding the nuances of the professional growth process and leaders' contribution to school performance (Crow et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2020; Tubin, 2017). Identity transition from teacher to principal is also a central idea of principal leadership development, which seeks to give aspiring leaders a good sense of a new professional role. Given the link between leadership identity and development established in the previous section, the former is selected as one of two key conceptual aspects of the framework underpinning this study.

Professional identity is a complex notion that has no universal definition. Scribner and Crow (2012) state that professional identity in leadership means: “What influences a leader's behaviours and what drives a leader's willingness and ability to take on and enact creative and effective leadership in a high stake, dynamic knowledge society” (p. 245). It can be understood as “the assessment of self,” which includes all emotions,

feelings, and thoughts about self in a professional context (Mundiri & Manshur, 2020, p.80). Nordholm et al. (2023) clarify that professional identity is an individual and collective construction situated in time, space, and place, meaning that it is a very flexible, ever-changing, and context-specific notion. Sanchez-Moreno et al (2021) distinguish professional identity from the formal position (e.g., a school leader) because the former is internal and stems from meanings and expectations, whereas the latter is external as it originates from positions in a specific social structure. As Bairašauskienė (2019) notes, being a leader and acting as a leader is not the same as feeling like a leader.

Touchton et al (2017) argue that most people do not ponder their professional and personal identities. They may feel a desire to become someone, but most accept their position, without self-reflection. Yet, having a well-established identity is crucial to becoming a successful leader, and it also plays an important role in leadership development as aspiring leaders progressively gain a sense of self in relation to their settings (Cruz-González et al., 2020; Touchton et al., 2017). According to Sánchez-Moreno et al. (2021), professional identity comprises self-image, values, feelings, and emotions, that significantly affect role enactment. It is also a powerful tool of micro-emancipation, which encourages the leaders to embrace creativity, autonomy, and self-regulation and demonstrate personal commitment to the organisation (Sánchez-Moreno et al., 2021). When the leader's identity is crystalised, they can adapt, innovate or revolt, thus emphasising their own individualism as leaders (Crow et al, 2017).

There is increasing interest in identity formation for school leaders. Recent studies demonstrate that professional identity is very complex and hybrid and that it can be manipulated in different ways to meet social expectations (Blose et al., 2022; Sánchez-Moreno et al., 2021). Jerdborg (2022), following a study in Sweden, showed that principals can develop their identities differently, based on their degree of involvement in the working process. For example, organisation-oriented principals may construct their identity around participation and competence, whereas their task-based counterparts may focus more on non-participation. Jerdborg (2022) emphasises that the chosen path may significantly affect one's career progression and the desire to stay in

the profession. Cruz-González et al. (2020) revealed gender-related barriers to developing a school principal identity, suggesting that gender-sensitive leadership development may be required.

The process of identity transition from teacher to principal is important and deserves particular attention in this chapter. Robertson (2017) explains that identity is in a constant state of flux, which cannot be separated from contexts and relationships, and which is highly subject to cultural influences. The construction of identity involves the negotiation of issues around power, emotion, and social connections (Robertson, 2017). Professional teacher identity consciously and unconsciously evolves into the principal identity as teachers move forward on their personal career trajectories. Identity changes as one develops new values, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences of leadership in the educational setting (Robertson, 2017). There are essentially two ways in which identity transition may happen. First, it can happen as leaders balance personal values with external demands by utilising agency e.g., through reflection, self-regulation, and positive psychology). Second, transition can be promoted through professional learning or the support of professional networks (Robertson, 2017). An important pre-requisite to successful transition is the existence of support systems and a comprehensive approach to one's professional development. Without this opportunity to develop leadership, newly-appointed principals may lack a clear leadership identity and can leave the role prematurely, unable to meet its demands (Simon et al., 2018). The transition process plays a crucial role in constructing clearly defined, strong leadership identities.

Notman (2016) argues that the professional identity of school principals is rarely fixed but it is rather transitional and constructed "between personal motivations activated by core values and the enactment of adaptive leadership practice" (p. 12). He considers it a natural process of adjustment to the context and people, which is linked to contingency leadership. Crow (2006) claims that identity formation is a long process that a leader undergoes as they climb the career ladder. This evolution is particularly visible when comparing novice and experienced principals. Novice principals are newcomers to the occupation who face the expectations of diverse school stakeholders, as well as

their own expectations about their new role, as they develop a new identity as principals. Hallinger and Heck (2011) argue that principalship is a multidimensional job, involving overlapping instructional, organisational and political roles, which they may struggle to manage, leading to an identity dilemma. Jerdborg (2022) adds that novice leaders may feel lonely, which makes them question their professional identity. In such situations, principal development programmes are crucial for making their identity more resilient.

Experienced principals are those who have already established themselves in the occupation and, in terms of identity, they have to deal with internal issues, particularly with the transformation of their own professional identity and evaluating their personal growth (Robertson, 2017). Cardno and Youngs (2018) suggest that, to enhance their personal growth, experienced principals can benefit from professional development which focuses on their personal and relational abilities, to enhance teamwork. Identity development may be just as relevant for experienced principals as it is for novice leaders, so leadership development through socialisation is required in both cases.

According to Crow and Møller (2017), principals “present, claim, confirm, refine, and further negotiate their identities” on the micro-level of schools as they engage with teachers, parents, students, and community members (p. 754). On the macro level, these professionals’ identities are further constructed through the negotiation of political values and power hierarchies (Crow & Møller, 2017). The influence of the cultural context on the established principals’ identities should also be recognised. It can shape the way they perceive themselves by affecting the way the principals’ work is recognised in society, how it is governed by policies, and what professional ethics and beliefs are rooted on the national level (Crow & Møller, 2017). Identity transition may occur at different points in a career trajectory, and it is difficult to establish the specific point at which this happens, as it is different for every individual. However, it is often linked to the socialisation process, which is discussed in the next section.

Socialisation

Socialisation links to identity to provide a twin conceptual framework for this study. Understanding the context within which leadership develops and fully understanding

their roles and expectations can contribute towards developing a stronger professional identity as school leaders (Lumby & English, 2009). Therefore, in evaluating leadership development, it is important to address how the individual identities of leaders may be transformed via socialisation. This term is understood as a process of learning a new role, which can occur in both pre-service and in-service stages (the latter may be referred to as organisational socialisation) (Crow, 2007). Bengtson (2014) emphasises that socialisation is not a single event that occurs within a limited period. Leaders may start this process well before becoming school principals and may continue to experience it as they prepare to adopt a new role (Bengtson, 2014).

Socialisation activities provide an opportunity for teachers to transform their identity by improving their skills and capabilities, as well as their self-perception. Bush (2018) states that embracing the role of a principal includes three stages of socialisation. First, aspiring leaders need professional socialisation, defined as the process of developing a role-based identity with values, standards and symbols (Brody et al, 2010). Second, they need personal socialisation which involves adjusting their identity from teacher to principal. Third, these leaders require a phase of organisational socialisation to learn to lead in a specific school (Bush, 2018). Heck (2003) clarifies that professional socialisation involves official preparation, where it happens, and the early stages of professional practice, whereas organisational socialisation offers the opportunity to become acquainted with the particular context where leadership is practiced. Since leadership is a complex phenomenon, effective socialisation involves a role-making dimension, as against a role-taking dimension, which can better prepare principals to deal with the complexity of leadership contexts, by enabling them to gain the required characteristics to address the dynamic nature of school contexts (Lindle, 2004).

Murphy (2020) sets this theory in context by examining how Irish school principals go through stages of socialisation. The period before embarking on their leadership careers, and their career pathways, were as formative as more formal stages of their preparation, such as leadership preparation programmes. Murphy (2020) also suggests that socialisation also occurs before one decides to be a leader through anticipatory socialisation (see Figure 2.1 below). This idea echoes the views of Crow (2006), and

Day et al. (2012), who maintain that internalisation of a desire to become a leader should be the first step of leadership development. Murphy (2020) also reflects on the limitations of looking at leadership preparation through the prism of ‘the leadership pipeline,’ instead inviting readers to recognise the effects of the policy context on how school principals are developed. Other studies also examine how local and global forces shape the process of leadership development (Normand et al., 2021). Figure 2.1 shows Murphy’s (2020) conceptualisation of leadership development, which is linked to socialisation.

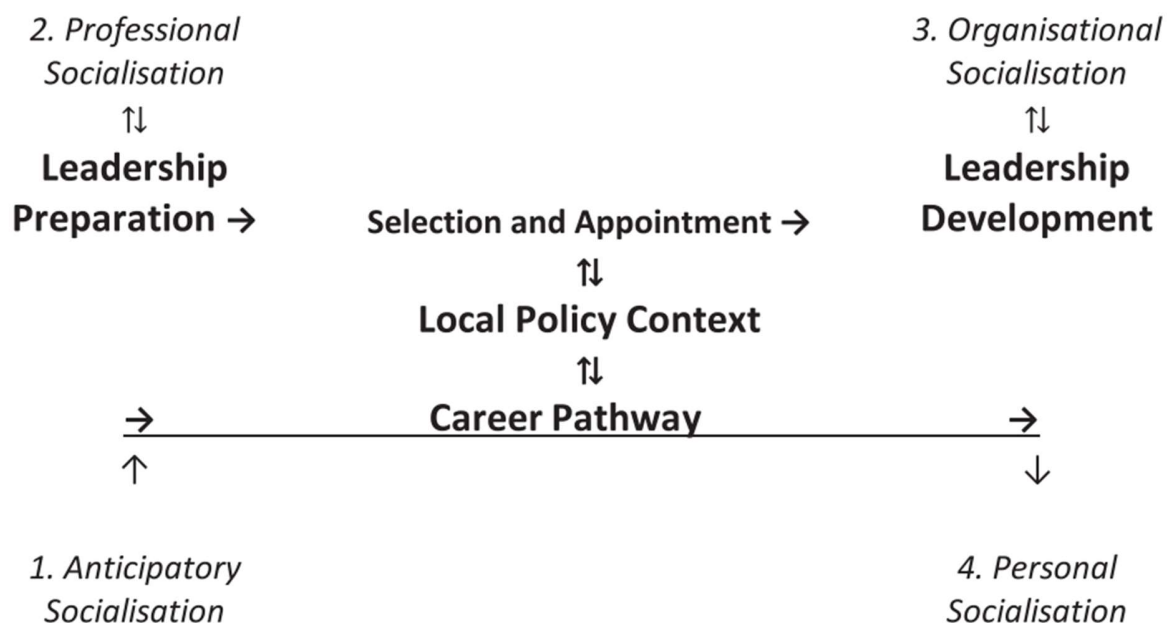


Figure 2.1 Framework of Leadership Preparation (Murphy, 2020).

Figure 2.1 shows four main stages of socialisation: (1) anticipatory occurs from early life through social interactions in family and community; (2) professional develops as one enters the teaching profession either formally (through training) or incidentally; (3) organisational occurs in a specific organisational setting and is highly situational; (4) personal develops as one continuously internalises the new role (Murphy, 2020).

Miscenko et al (2017) claim that a completely developed leader identity occurs over a long period of time by developing and crystalising through the process of socialisation. To enable a smooth transition of a leader’s identity, via socialisation, Brody et al. (2010) suggest developing a conceptualised role of a leader in a like-minded society where

professional values, beliefs, and worldviews are shared between members. This can enable identity development and strengthen the underlying values and standards of society. By doing so, the links between this idealised role and one's personal behaviour add to a professional identity (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). However, it is often difficult to achieve this in practice. Ho and Kang (2022) show that the professional identity formation of aspiring principals can be stifled if the current principals acting as socialising agents create a large power distance. As a result, future leaders are denied an opportunity to take greater responsibility and build a strong professional identity (Ho & Kang, 2022). Similar findings were presented by Leaf (2023), who studied the socialisation of deputy principals in Australia. The study showed that aspiring school leaders were often constrained by socialisation into their deputy roles and role allocation based on purely managerial considerations. As a result, the participants were contained in their roles, which prevented them from growing further (Leaf, 2023). Another problem concerns the phenomenon known as cloning, which consists of aspiring leaders emulating the behaviour, leadership styles, values, and activities of their mentors, thus losing their own individuality and the flexibility needed to respond to complex challenges (Crow, 2001).

Ali Kılınç and Gümüş (2020) contribute to better understanding of the challenges of socialisation through their systematic review of the literature that provided evidence from multiple countries. They argue that there are several barriers to socialisation for novice principals. These include management of time and financial resources, conflicting stakeholder demands, a highly bureaucratised system, isolation and loneliness, and the difficulty of adjusting to the existing school culture (Kılınç & Gümüş, 2020). These findings demonstrate the diversity of challenges that may prevent effective socialisation and point to the importance of creating a more favourable setting for leadership socialisation and development in schools. Bengtson (2014) adds that a toxic organisational culture may also stifle socialisation by slowing down the assimilation of a newcomer to the team.

Drawing from the various ideas discussed above, the researcher's understanding of socialisation is that it may be both a planned and unplanned process (Crow, 2006).

Professional socialisation may be planned, where there are formal leadership preparation programmes, but it is usually inadvertent and incremental. Personal and organisational socialisation are necessarily individual and contextual. As Bush and Oduro (2006) note, new principals in Africa rarely receive any formal leadership training. They are appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership potential, and the induction and support they receive are usually inadequate. This has also been observed in Mexico (Gonzalez, 2023). Most of his participants did not have formal pre-appointment leadership training and had to rely on informal pre-role preparation (Ibid).

However, formal induction, support and training do not necessarily ensure that principals are equipped with the skills, attitudes, knowledge and motivation to lead their schools effectively (Bush & Oduro, 2006). The expectation that professional, personal and organisational socialisation are required to enable novice principals to develop their identity as school leaders, may be problematic in Saudi Arabia, because it is a centralised and highly bureaucratic education system, which offers educational leaders limited independence and embraces the notion that principals and leaders can do little to change it (Alghamdi & Abdullgawad, 2002; Almannie, 2015). This implies that an informal, 'natural,' socialisation process may serve to develop a principal identity which conforms to the centralised and bureaucratic model of Saudi educational system (Alghamdi & Abdullgawad, 2002; Almannie, 2015).

According to Crow (2006), anticipatory socialisation occurs during teaching experience when there are three main foundations of role conception: observing principal work when they were teachers, their individual experience as teachers, and non-education work experience (Crow & Glascock, 1995). This type of anticipatory socialisation can be considered unplanned, or 'natural', as socialisation processes commence when principals start their teaching profession which, as Crow (2006) suggests, offers the opportunity to comprehend how these novice principals develop their instructional alignment, their understanding of the nature of knowledge, their social and cultural sensitivity to students, and ideas of instructional leadership.

Mentoring and Coaching

Mentoring and coaching deserve particular attention in the context of principal socialisation as they are two of the most powerful tools of identity formation through social relationships in a specific educational setting (Crow & Southworth, 2003; Theodosiou & Karagiorgi, 2015). Mentoring is defined as an “interpersonal relationship characterised by intentional efforts on the part of a more experienced/skilled person (mentor) to support and develop a less experienced/skilled person (protégé)” (Malin & Hackman, 2016, p. 159). Crow (2001) understands mentoring as one of the most popular socialisation tools, which performs three main functions: professional, career, and psychosocial development. Mentors contribute to professional development by helping aspiring leaders to acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed to adopt a leadership role (Crow & Southworth, 2003). Mentors also perform a career development function by helping the mentees increase awareness and to pursue career growth through social networking. Finally, the psychological development function refers to mentors’ contribution to aspiring leaders’ emotional well-being, role expectations, and the resolution of professional identity conflicts (Crow, 2001; Crow & Southworth, 2003).

There are several different mentoring processes. The first involves interpersonal relationships where an aspiring leader is supported by an established leader in terms of developing a strong professional identity (Crow, 2001). The second process focuses more on translating expertise, power, and wisdom from the mentor to the mentee. The third rests on the use of a specifically designed plan tailored to the mentee’s unique needs, and involving a wider collaboration, which is closely linked to a process Jensen (2022) calls ‘boundary work.’ Thus, mentoring is not limited to one-on-one interaction but is located in a wider social context of schools and communities. In this way, mentoring recognises the social nature of leadership preparation and allows the creation of a sustainable, information-sharing learning culture through the collective effort of leadership development (Sezgin et al., 2020).

Coaching is another valuable source of socialisation. Jayaweera et al. (2021) distinguish it from mentoring by noting that it typically takes place within a shorter time frame and aims to develop a set of specific skills. Lochmiller (2013) defines it as an

“induction strategy that supports principals in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to be successful as instructional leaders (p. 60). Unlike mentoring, which can engage a wider social network, coaching is described as essentially a one-on-one activity of transmitting knowledge and experience from one leader to another (Lochmiller, 2013). Coaching can be aimed at helping leaders to achieve specific identified outcomes related to the principals’ performance standards or to overcome specific challenges (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). Theodosiou and Karagiorgi (2015) point out that experiential learning, encompassing mentoring and coaching, has become a core component of principal induction programmes, providing meaningful context-based opportunities that help new leaders to translate knowledge into practice. Jayaweera et al (2021) also argue that mentorship-style socialisation models like coaching are highly effective because they promote professional development through an ongoing professional association with a new role.

International Research

The aim of this section is to review international research on school leadership development. The next sub-section provides a review of the research from the US, with the key themes of leadership preparation, leadership development, identity, and socialisation. The subsequent sub-section offers a review of the research from the UK, mostly England, using the same key themes. As noted earlier, these two countries were chosen because they both have extensive research and literature on leadership preparation and development.

Review of research from the US

Centralised influence has thus been a notable characteristic of leadership preparation in the US, with university-based school leadership programmes being encouraged to follow the national standards, to harmonise leaders’ preparation and practice (Young & Crow, 2016). Young and Crow (2016) shows that leadership development in the USA is heavily shaped by various national standards, such as the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards and the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). The latter, previously known as Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, apply to all levels of educational leadership including

principals, assistant principals, district leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The key benefit of PSEL is claimed to be that: “The standards reflect a positive approach to leadership that is optimistic, emphasizes development and strengths, and focuses on human potential” (Ibid, p.3). The great majority of US states have adopted these standards, which are also widely applied at the district, professional organisation, and accrediting body levels (Young, 2020).

Murphy (2017) argues that the PSEL provides comprehensive guidelines in terms of school leadership by offering autonomy to school principals to develop culturally responsive schools. He points out a key difference between the ISLLC and PSEL Standards, by arguing that, with the ISLLC standards, problems regarding ethics, equality and culturally responsive schooling were categorised under a single heading. However, according to Murphy (2017), PSEL addresses them as individual topics and provides comprehensive guidance to leadership for curriculum, instruction and evaluation. It also helps school leaders, such as principals, to develop the professional capacity of teachers and staff (Boyce & Bowers, 2018).

This notion of entrusting the responsibility to principals to develop the professional capacity of teachers highlights the importance of pre-service preparation programmes for principals, to impact positively upon school and student outcomes (Orphanos & Orr, 2014). Pounder (2011) argues that empirical research in the US focuses on achieving a consensus about programme features which best prepare aspiring principals. For example, Darling-Hammond et al. (2011) evaluated eight pre-service principal training programmes in the US and note that these programmes have several common features. These are the alignment of a coherent curriculum with externally established professional and/or state standards, a focus on instructional leadership and school improvement to direct the programme philosophy and curriculum, the utilisation of active and student-centred learning strategies, a teaching faculty comprising experts and scholars in their subjects, official mentoring systems and partners, a stringent approach to choosing participants, and administered internships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

A signature feature of school leadership preparation in the US is that qualifications are mandatory in almost all states (Bush, 2018). Orr (2011) shows that aspiring leaders

cannot become even an assistant principal in at least 36 states without a master's degree in educational administration. Walker et al. (2013) argue that New York City's Aspiring Principals Programme (APP) is an example of a preparation programme that aspiring leaders are expected to complete. It is developed by the provider, New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA), based on various standards set at the national, state and city levels. The notable dimensions of this programme include personal behaviour, flexibility, communication, emphasis on student performance, situational problem-solving, learning, answerability for professional practice, management, leadership development, climate and culture, time (task and project management) and technology (Walker et al., 2013).

Bryant et al. (2022) provide an analysis of the changes that have been made since the introduction of the APP and compare these efforts with programmes of this kind from other countries, including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, and Singapore. They claim that a new emphasis has been placed on quality and cultural responsiveness in leadership development programmes (Bryant et al., 2022). Moreover, there has been a growing recognition of leadership being based in schools, with calls to develop leaders' situational awareness rather than a set of pre-defined skills. For example, a new School Building Leader (SBL) certification can be obtained by completing the Leaders in Education Apprenticeship Programme (LEAP). It focuses on nurturing skills in instructional leadership, school culture and school improvement, and pedagogic experience (Bryant et al., 2022). After comparing the existing US leadership preparation programmes with their counterparts in other countries, particularly Singapore, Bryant et al. (2022) conclude that they are often developed by a provider but rely on a range of sources for their development. However, US programmes are distinguished by their local focus, which allows them to address specific problems within low-performing schools in disadvantaged communities (Bryant et al., 2022).

The significant influence of various foundations and professional organisations on school leadership development is another distinctive feature of the US setting. Young and Crow (2016) argue that organisations, such as the Wallace Foundation, have contributed greatly to the field by developing signature programmes (e.g., the State

Action for Educational Leadership Project). A focus on learning communities has been a notable feature of these programmes, which demonstrate that the USA recognises the social nature of leadership development (Young & Crow, 2016). Professional organisations, such as the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), have also been very helpful, allowing policymakers to generate the research needed to inform the design of comprehensive leadership development programmes (Young & Crow, 2016). Finally, there have also been various state and federal leadership development programmes which can meet local educational needs through more targeted leadership interventions (Young & Crow, 2016).

Another set of studies on the US focuses on the specific outcomes of leadership development programmes. Grissom et al.'s (2017) evaluation of the US leadership development assessment programme, the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), shows that candidates with high SLLA scores are more likely to be employed as principals, but there is little evidence that SLLA scores provide meaningful measures of principal job performance, including supervisors' evaluation ratings or teachers' evaluations of school leadership. Thus, Grissom et al. (2017) question whether SLLA can measure principals' job performance. Similarly, Corcoran's (2017) evaluation of the US Principal Preparation Programmes (PPPs) suggests that there is a growing interest in principal effectiveness as a mean of improving teaching and student learning, which has led to an emphasis on the quality of PPPs and calls for the adoption of PPP accountability systems identical to those of teacher preparation programmes. However, Corcoran (2017) notes that student test scores do not fully capture principal effectiveness in the US context and should not be solely utilised in making high-stakes' decisions concerning programmes or individuals.

Review of research from the UK

The UK has four separate education systems for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, following the introduction of devolved administrations in 1999 (Bush, 2013). Within England, school leadership preparation was powerfully influenced by the establishment of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000, regarded by Bush (2013) as the most important initiative for leadership development. When

developing leadership preparation programmes, it is important to establish whether the provision is targeted at current or aspiring principals (Bush, 2011). For example, the NCSL's previous Leadership Development Framework offered programmes at five levels from middle leaders to consultant principals (NCSL, 2012). Thus, the focus of the NCSL was to develop leadership for current and aspiring heads. Simkins (2012) argues that one of the benefits offered by the NCSL was that it successfully took into consideration the patterns of evolving leadership development provision in England, in answer to varying notions of how the school system should be organised.

NCSL made provision for leaders at all levels, including the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which was launched in 1997 (NPQH, 2020). As the name suggests, the NPQH is regarded as a professional qualification and emphasises more what principals can do rather than their leadership knowledge (Bush, 2013). The NPQH was mandatory for new principals from 2009 but reverted to discretionary status in 2012 (NPQH, 2020). In 2017, the UK government announced that the English NPQH needed to be updated to ensure that it remained relevant to the emerging challenges faced by the educational setting (Lambert, 2018). Although these efforts are important, Male (2017) pointed to an alarming lack of evidence regarding the current demands of school leadership and the effectiveness of the existing leadership development opportunities. Since their study in 2017, not much evidence has been collected, which prevents a thorough assessment of NPQH outcomes.

Only accredited providers from the Department of Education can offer NPQH and either existing principals, or those who aspire to be a head, can apply and this also involves leaders with roles across schools, such as national leaders of education (Chapman & Salokangas, 2013; NPQH, 2020). According to Bush (2013), NPQH teaching methods include coaching, group learning, and networking. However, Bush (2013) argues that coaching is conducive only when training is comprehensive and specific, when there is cautious matching of coach and coachee, and when it is part of a broader learning process. Other teaching methods, such as on-the-job training, access to high quality resources, utilisation of contemporary research & evidence, and prospects for structured reflection, are required to be included (NPQH, 2020).

The increasing decentralisation of the educational system in the UK gives individual schools and their leaders more freedom in deciding how they want to source and share effective practices to facilitate system-level change (Greany & Brown, 2017). It has important implications for leadership development, setting more demanding expectations for principals. Greany (2022) discusses this change in detail, arguing that decentralisation forces principals to take responsibility for complex operational areas such as pedagogy, staffing, and budgets, as well as to navigate competitive market incentives. They need to lead their schools in the context of increasing accountability and performance assessments (Greany, 2022). According to Greany (2022), “decentralisation requires creative, systems thinkers and boundary spanners, able to engage and facilitate contributions from multiple stakeholders across complex adaptive systems” (p. 260). However, it is not clear whether the existing leadership development system can prepare such leaders.

Boylan (2012) also argues that leadership development in England calls for systems thinking by educational leaders as an essential tool to enact change for the educational system. NSCL (2012) argues that systems thinking offers two different dimensions. First, school principals are system leaders as their actions impact upon system-wide change (Greany, 2016; 2017). Second is the normative view that heads should lead system-wide change, reinforcing the concept of a self-improving school system (Greany, 2014; Hargreaves, 2011). However, a study by Greany and Waterhouse (2016) found that school principals in England often cannot meet these expectations. In their analysis of how English schools adapted to the 2014 National Curriculum, they found that relatively few schools were bold enough to design innovative curricula that would help their students meet the 21st-century demands. The authors concluded that school principals lacked the leadership agency and confidence to challenge the status quo, even when the system allowed them this opportunity (Greany & Waterhouse, 2016).

Descriptive and normative ways of systems thinking collectively form a leadership paradigm, by addressing issues related to the professional identity and socialisation of educational leaders, including principals (Hartley, 2010). Bush (2013) argues that NSCL

provision mostly targets leaders who are currently in post, such as middle leaders and current heads, adding that this comprises leadership development. In contrast, the NPQH is a preparatory programme for aspiring heads. These two approaches can be considered as different aspects of socialisation (Bush, 2016). Leadership development is required to prepare principals for both professional socialisation, via formal preparatory programmes, and organisational socialisation, by making them familiar with the specific context in which leadership is to be exercised (Cottrell and James, 2016). For example, internships offered in NPQH can be regarded as a specific form of networking which can help principals with professional socialisation, as they are offered placements in another school for between five and 20 days, which can help aspiring principals to develop a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Robinson, 2011; Bush, 2016). Thus, leadership development in England includes both preparation and development and is expected to deal with issues relating to identity and socialisation of principals.

Greany and McGinity (2021) described an important structural phenomenon for leadership socialisation in England called Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). These organisations unite school leaders from all over the country to discuss measures and strategies to standardise and improve educational provision. Participation in MATs encourages principals to balance their autonomy as independent school leaders while developing their leadership identity through professional collaboration (Greany & McGinity, 2021). Glazer et al. (2022) add that leaders can also develop within “middle-tier” organisations (MTOs), which include local authorities, district central offices, charter management organisations (CMOs), and other school support organisations. Although Greany and McGinity (2021), and Glazer et al. (2022), did not focus on leaders’ identity and socialisation, they provide a good understanding of the professional context in which these are developed.

Gulf Research

This section reviews research on school leadership development within the Gulf countries, notably the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. These states are characterised by political, social and economic similarities, as

evidenced by the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 (Bailey et al., 2019). The review of the literature on these countries is important because they are all located in the same geographical area as Saudi Arabia. They are also Islamic States with Arabic as a common language, and they have similarities in having largely centralised education systems. These states also have a shared understanding of school leadership, as they consider educators to be civil servants situated in a bureaucratic system and furthering the aims and vision of the country (Bailey et al., 2019). Moreover, Gulf states are also seeking to diversify their economies away from oil production, so they need highly effective educational systems to generate knowledge and skills for the 21st century (Alsharija & Watters, 2020). However, leadership development in each country evolved according to its own trajectory (Hammad et al., 2023a; Hammad & Hallinger, 2017). A country-by-country discussion is adopted here to explore distinctive notions of leadership preparation, leadership development, identity and socialisation, following an overview of these ideas across the Gulf.

Notions of leadership development in the Gulf

What constitutes effective leadership development in the Gulf countries remains vague (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2018). One reason for this is that the notion of leadership is heavily influenced by a Western understanding of educational leadership, usually overwhelming their Arab viewpoint and understanding of educational leadership (Al-Dabbagh & Assaad, 2010). Thus, notions of leadership development face: “The tension between dominant “Western” perspectives on leadership and “local” needs and realities” (Al-Dabbagh & Assaad, 2010, p. 11). However, Hammad and Hallinger (2017, p. 435) argue that various scholars, including Arabs, have started to study leadership development “outside of traditional Anglo-American centres of management scholarship”, producing native models of leadership development. This change has been informed by the increasingly popular idea that leadership development and leadership effectiveness can only be understood within their socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Hammad & Alazmi, 2020). For example, leadership development for a New York principal will greatly differ from that of

the Riyadh principal simply because there are many differences characterising educational systems in the USA and the KSA.

A literature review conducted by Hammad and Hallinger (2017) reveals a shifting belief in the unique approaches and conceptualisations of school leadership in the Gulf region, in which Western-based models may not apply. The scholars found variations in how leadership development is perceived and pursued depending on the political system, noting differences between conservative states, such as Saudi Arabia, and more liberal ones, such as Kuwait and the UAE (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017). Moreover, existing research is focused on the social context of leadership and recognises the effects of social factors, such as gender, on leadership development and practice. The review demonstrates that there is limited current or recent research on school leadership in the Gulf region, suggesting a strong need for updates (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017).

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

There is increasing interest in research on school leadership in the UAE, in the context of a fast-evolving educational system. Rai and Beresford-Dey (2023) demonstrate that, in the last 20 years, research on leadership competency (recruitment and professional development of school leaders) and their capacity building has expanded considerably. They add that the UAE has redesigned principals' professional development to enable them to work within a student-centric system and to meet the increasing demands of educational standards and accountability (Rai & Marie Beresford-Dey, 2023). Managing finance, resources, and facilities is centralised in the UAE, so these aspects are not included in leadership development programmes (Rai & Marie Beresford-Dey, 2023). Matsumoto (2019) notes that school principals in the UAE are powerful figures, but they are merely gatekeepers for the directives and initiatives handed down from higher levels of the hierarchy. Their decision-making in managerial and pedagogical spheres is also limited (Matsumoto, 2019).

The UAE has mandatory qualifications for new principals (Hourani & Stringer, 2015). It has developed a professional development programme for principals which offers knowledge and tools to facilitate teachers to embrace pupil-centred teaching and

learning methods, inclusive of parents as partners (ADEC, 2011). For example, Decree No. 53 (2017), from the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), requires that: “Principals, vice-principals, heads of faculty and teachers must undergo professional development” (ADEC, 2011). The UAE has also launched a professional development programme for principals called, “Qiyada (to lead)” which aims at developing the skills which guide school principals to examine, evaluate and support classroom teachers in their planning and implementation of the “New School Model” (ADEC, 2011). The five standards, which are linked to professional development of leaders, are: “Leading strategically, leading teaching & learning, leading the organisation, leading the people and leading the community” (Hourani & Stringer, 2015, p. 779).

However, guidelines provided by the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) for principal leadership development, lack a focus on the hiring and formal professional development of these professionals (Rai & Marie Beresford-Dey, 2023). An empirical study into educators’ beliefs about leadership training, conducted by David and Abukari (2019), suggests that more efforts should be made to expand and perfect leadership development initiatives and programmes. Similarly, Hourani and Litz (2018) show that Emirati school leaders did not receive the professional development needed to meet professional performance standards. They recommend that strategic planning, curriculum design, and documentation, should be included in capacity-building programmes for principals (Hourani & Litz, 2018).

The issues of identity and socialisation of principals in UAE are addressed by incorporating the notions of “Ta’leem (school leadership education)”, and “Tarbiyyah (embedding school leadership values and ideals) (Sellami et al., 2019). This is done through principal preparation programmes which aim at developing intellectual knowledge (Ta’leem) and developing leadership values (Tarbiyyah), such as moral, rational and social values, among principals to strengthen school improvement initiatives (Pedder, 2016). Rai and Beresford-Dey (2023) found that leaders who undergo this development report increased confidence, motivation, and empowerment, which can be linked to improved professional identities.

Qatar

Qatar also has embarked on a long and challenging journey of educational decentralisation, impeded by internal forces, influences, and cultural expectations (Huda, 2022). The 2007 education reforms emphasised autonomy and accountability within the Independent School Model (Vogel & Alhudithi, 2023). The Ministry of Education granted local schools' authority and financial responsibility, giving them more decision-making power and setting more demanding accountability standards (Huda, 2022). As a result, there has been a greater demand for trained and competent school leaders able to promote the change.

Qatar has a mandatory leadership preparation standard, "Qatar National Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders (QNPSTSL), launched in 2007 (Romanowski et al., 2019). Initially, the QNPSTSL comprised 12 Professional Standards for Teachers and seven Professional Standards for School Leaders, which were short action-driven statements explaining the main areas of professional practice. There were also 28 Standard statements describing the anticipated results of professional practice for each standard (QNPSTSL, 2015). However, these standards were reduced to 5 standards and 22 statements for School Leaders in 2015:

"To make the Standards sharper and more relevant. These standards focus on strategic leadership, leadership, leading teaching and learning, continuous improvement processes, leading individuals and teams, and leading and managing relations with parents". (QNPSTSL, 2015, p. 3).

Under QNPSTSL, it is mandatory for principals to complete two levels of professional development, Principal Core Level 1 (PC1) and Principal Core Level 2 (PC2). The PC1 programme involves becoming effective strategic school principals, examining progress, making improvements, and leading continuous change for improvement (Nasser, 2017). The PC2 programme involves: "Advancing strategic leadership, driving student achievement and leading and embedding a culture of continuous learning". (Romanowski et al., 2019, p. 762). QNPSTSL also offers practices related to identity and socialisation of principals (QNPSTSL, 2015). Romanowski et al (2019) suggest that professional identity and socialisation for new principals are developed by building:

“Professional relationships based on mutual respect... professional development strategies including mentoring and coaching and trusting people and their judgements” (p. 192).

Several studies have been recently conducted to examine how Qatari school leaders themselves perceive their development opportunities and needs. For example, Hammad et al. (2024) revealed that Qatari school leaders felt that they were properly trained to interact with the community, build relationships with staff and parents and promote school improvement. However, they reported a lack of preparation in areas of resource acquisition, budgeting, paperwork and compliance with policies. Activities located at the intersection of leadership and management/administrative work seem to require more attention in principle preparation programmes (Hammad et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Vogel and Alhudithi (2023) found that female school leaders in Qatar prioritise instructional leadership, focusing primarily on classroom observations and feedback. They also reported completing courses that encompassed much more than instructional leadership. Participants also emphasised the importance of pre-service experience as a prerequisite for an effective principal role. Being a school coordinator, performing administrative duties, or working in the Ministry of Education, were all regarded as useful experiences (Vogel & Alhudithi, 2023). Another study by Floyd et al. (2023) found that middle leaders (e.g., heads of departments) in Qatar experienced a lack of leadership growth opportunities. However, this study concerns university leadership more, so its results cannot be generalised to the school setting. Much of the remaining research mainly concerns teacher experiences of leadership or professional development. More research on principals is required to understand their leadership development needs.

Oman

The notion of leadership preparation for school principals is relatively new in Oman, which focuses on the provision of basic education, defined as: “A type of education that integrates theory and practice, idea and work, and education and life” (Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2019, p. 239). The Ministry of Education has taken steps to decentralise its education system as regional directorates of education have been developed in 11

governorates throughout Oman, and school principals have more autonomy in managing their schools (Hammad & Bush, 2021; International Bureau of Education, 2011). These changes created the need for leadership training to enable school principals to assume their new roles and responsibilities. The Ministry of Education has established the Department of Human Resources Development to supervise principal training programmes (Hammad & Bush, 2021). In 2006, Principal Leadership Training (PLT) was introduced using a cascade model of training and focusing on transformational and instructional leadership. The Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT), launched in 2016, is another milestone in school leadership development in Oman. It provides different training options and covers a wide range of skills and competencies, including the promotion of school improvement and change, professional development and teacher-parent collaboration (Hammad & Bush, 2021).

Leadership preparation in Oman involves developing instructional supervision, which has received: “Special attention and preparation for playing a more powerful, facilitative role in the professional development of teachers in Omani schools” (Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2019, p. 240). Instructional supervision involves monitoring classroom observation, planning and preparation related to classroom observation, holding a post-conference discussion after the observation, and providing feedback for future actions (Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2019). However, Al-Ani & Al-Harhi (2017) criticise instructional supervision as a mode of leadership preparation in Oman by describing it as: “repetitive, outdated and insufficient” (p. 210). They recommend developing leadership skills through distributing roles to teachers, encouraging them to take on more responsibility in the school, and building a second line of administration.

Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) highlight the importance of paying more attention to principal development in Oman to address school staff’s need for support and to nurture a climate of trust that may be currently lacking. In a mixed-methods study investigating Omani principals’ perceptions of leadership development, Hammad and Bush (2021) provided further guidance on how school leadership can be enhanced. The scholars found that while Omani principals reported being adequately prepared for their jobs,

they considered certain leadership aspects as problematic. These included communicating with parents, managing paperwork, leading school improvement initiatives, improving staff performance, balancing Ministry directives with local needs, and dealing with financial issues (Hammad & Bush, 2021). Hammad et al (2023a) add that Omani school principals highlighted the importance of participation, building genuine relationships, and specific personal attributes, to lead successfully (Hammad et al., 2023a). These findings suggest that school principals in Oman can benefit from more context-specific preparation.

The most recent policies issued by the Ministry of Education and reflected in updated laws signify Oman's commitment to standardising and improving principal preparation and addressing the limitations mentioned in scholarly research. For instance, the 2023 School Education Law aims to empower school administrations to continuously improve educational supervision (Balushi, 2024). This includes evaluating each school's unique needs and designing effective professional development programmes, including leadership development. It is also important to clarify that principal leadership preparation in Oman is currently obligatory. According to the 2024 Guideline for Job Candidacy in Educational Supervision and School Administration, educators willing to occupy a principal position can complete any of the two types of available programmes: the strategic programme for school leaders delivered by the Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers and the enrichment programmes presupposing 25 hours of training (UNESCO, 2024). The same guideline also contains assessment criteria for candidates applying for school leadership positions. In this way, clear regulation creates transparency and simplifies the development of leadership skills.

Kuwait

Kuwait has a highly centralised educational system (Alazmi & Al-Mahdy, 2020). All decisions, including those related to leadership development, are made by the local Ministry of Education. The Integrated Education Reform Program, created in 2014, sought to reduce the negative effects of this centralisation, which resulted in greater attention being paid to the role of leaders in managing educational processes at regional and local levels (Alazmi & Al-Mahdy, 2020). However, Alazmi and Al-Mahdy

(2020) maintain that these reform efforts have failed and that principals cannot meet the demanding expectations because of inadequate professional development. Their pessimism is shared by Alhashem and Alhouti (2020), who argue that the Ministry of Education in Kuwait lacks a clear vision and strategic capabilities to lead the change. This is a significant problem, given the findings of recent research showing the positive effect of leadership on school climate and productivity in Kuwait (Alazmi & Hammad, 2021).

There is a lack of formal preparation programmes for school principals and an absence of standards for its educational development programme (Alansari, 2012). However, the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2010) has developed training courses in the form of preparation workshops for appropriate applicants who have studied educational leadership, but these programmes are unable to prepare principals for post-service challenges, thus, challenging their effectiveness (General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning & Development, Kuwait, 2013). Alhouti & Male (2017) argue that principal preparation and development programmes require improvement through: "Offering ideas for experiences and training programmes that would help them lead public schools in Kuwait" (p. 100).

Alhouti & Male (2017) state that school principals face personal dimension issues in terms of preparation and induction which:

"relate mainly to the issues of reconciling self-image and preferred behaviours with the demands of the post...great consideration needed to be given to all aspects of selection, preparation and induction activities that support the personal, organisational and occupational dimensions of the transition to becoming a principal" (91-100).

Alenezi and Alsaleh (2021) report that school principals are not fully satisfied with the content of the existing leadership training programmes. Although not specifically focused on the topic of leadership training, Alsharija and Watters (2020) add that Kuwaiti principals struggle with areas such as organisational planning, building trust, finding the balance between autonomy and decentralisation, and restructuring schools.

More attention appears to be needed to modify principal development programmes in Kuwait to address principals' professional needs.

Saudi Arabia

Principal preparation and development in Saudi Arabia have changed following the introduction of the Tatweer programme in 2007 (Alqahtani et al., 2020). Almudarra (2017) claims that the new qualification standards brought by Tatweer were designed to ensure that only the most capable and skilled candidates can become school principals. These qualifications are a minimum of a bachelor's degree in education, four years' experience as a teacher, and having worked as an assistant principal for at least two years (Alnasser, 2019). School principals and assistant principals must have knowledge about instructional leadership, instructional strategies, and monitoring instruction (Alnasser, 2019). The Tatweer programme offers scholarships for aspiring principals to advance their knowledge of educational leadership and administration through various university-based courses (Alqahtani et al., 2020).

Despite these initiatives, according to Mathis (2010), it is difficult for the Ministry of Education to fill all available school principal positions with suitably qualified applicants, because few qualified teachers apply for these school principal roles. This may be due to leadership styles, workload pressure, administrative climate, and personal relationships that prevent educators from pursuing professional growth (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Diaz & Cruz, 2022; Ghamrawi & Al-Jammal, 2013; Heffernan, 2021; Perrone et al., 2019). Karim (2014) adds that: "Teachers may not have studied educational leadership in school, since not all Saudi universities include educational leadership or professional administration in bachelor's programs" (p. 123). However, this view may be outdated, given the modifications in principal preparation and development arising from Tatweer.

A related issue is that of national leadership standards as these are commonly used to frame the design of leadership development interventions and to define what good leadership looks like in any given system (OECD, 2007; Pont et al., 2008). In Saudi Arabia, there are no principal standards, and the limited selection criteria for principals are not always employed (OECD, 2020). According to Almudarra (2017), without

principal standards, Saudi Arabia also lacks criteria to utilise when selecting principals. According to OECD (2020), the only requirement to become a principal is passing a national examination administered by ETEC/QIYAS, but this condition is not always compulsory (OECD, 2020). However, ETEC is developing new principal standards by introducing educational leadership programmes with competitive entry criteria, which can be created with scholarship programmes that select and provide training for the most qualified potential principals (OECD, 2020). One way to raise the profile and skills of school leaders would be to establish a dedicated School Leadership Academy, possibly housed within the National Institute for Professional Educational Development (NIPED) (OECD, 2020). These new ETEC standards call for developing a strong emphasis on how principals are working with teachers to provide the curriculum, by adapting to learners' levels and requirements (OECD, 2020). The new standards of ETEC also call for modifying the processes and tools used in the principal supervision process. For example, the existing grids should be updated so that principal supervisors search for evidence that teachers are utilising formative evaluation in the classroom, offering feedback to students and adapting their teaching for individual learner needs (OECD, 2020). However, such standards can be critiqued for promoting 'designer leadership' (Greany, 2018), a comment that has implications for this study.

Another issue within Gulf countries is that identity and socialisation of principals are not included in the definition of leadership development (Alansari, 2012). This results in the inability of school preparation programmes to address the post-service challenges of principals (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020; Almannie, 2015). McGregor and Alghamdi (2022) addressed this problem in the context of Saudi female pre-service teachers who may later occupy leadership roles. These aspiring leaders need an intentionally planned socialisation process that would help them, not only to perform their immediate duties but also to contribute to nation-building efforts, as required by Vision 2030 (McGregor & Alghamdi, 2022).

In Saudi Arabia, the issues of identity and socialisation of principals arise from strict centralisation of the educational system (Alghamdi & Abdullgawad, 2002; Almannie, 2015). As a consequence, the 'natural' socialisation process leads to a principal identity

which complies with the centralised and bureaucratic system and accepts that school principals and leaders can do little to change it. Greany (2018) states that balancing the demands of policy and practice can be challenging as the system is subject to political demands and changes which can compromise leaders' role and potential impact. The development of the professional identity of school principals is problematic as they receive little or no leadership training before assuming the roles as school leaders, affecting their potential role as visionary leaders (Miqdadi et al., 2014). Inadequate or no school leadership preparation affects the socialisation process of school principals as they are not familiar with the school's prevalent culture and the demands of the role. This may restrict the development of school improvement initiatives (Alnasser, 2019). According to Lee and Louis (2019), and Mitchell (2021), a less centralised culture of communication and collaboration would enable better leadership development through socialisation, but it is not clear whether these recommendations would work in a Saudi setting.

Empirical studies on principal experiences of leadership development are important for understanding the policy gaps, but these are not abundant. Mahfouz and Gordon (2020) identified a significant gap in terms of Saudi principals' social-emotional competencies. Their research revealed that Saudi school leaders receive proper preparation in administrative areas, policy planning, and instructional leadership, but they find it difficult to manage stress, communicate with parents, and deal with day-to-day challenges (Mahfouz & Gordon, 2020). These findings reiterate the research on the essential leadership skills for schools discussed earlier in this chapter (Chen, 2022; Kadri et al., 2021; Rini et al., 2023). They also align with the study by Bailey et al. (2019), who examined wider patterns of school leadership in the Gulf region. Bailey et al. (2019) argued that, in more hierarchical cultures, such as the KSA, more attention is paid to educators' skill development than to their emotional support. However, although these findings are useful for understanding the context of leadership development in the KSA, more research is needed to explore Saudi principals' experiences of leadership development to generate context-specific knowledge that could inform comprehensive leadership training programmes. This gap provides the warrant for the present study.

Thematic Review of Gulf Research

This review of Gulf research exposed some common patterns concerning school leadership development. First, leadership preparation and development vary across the Gulf, but overall, leadership qualifications are either not mandatory or remain in an emergent phase, meaning that preparation and development for school leaders remain underdeveloped. The standard practice is usually that experienced senior teachers are promoted to the principalship position, even if they do not have the required preparation to become effective principals (Alnasser, 2019; Karim, 2014). Another important point to note is that the distinction between pre-service and post-service preparation is not clearly established in Gulf countries. Preparation is often determined by the provider and does not consider participants' perspectives in developing preparation programmes, due to the centralised educational systems (Almudarra, 2017). The given challenges are reported across the whole Arab region and are not limited to the GCC states (Arar et al., 2021; Lahmar, 2024; Laouni, 2023). As such, they draw attention to the commonly shared structural and governance issues, such as excessive centralisation, which may be the root of many leadership preparation challenges.

Second, there is only limited literature on school leadership in the cultural context of the Gulf region, perhaps indicating that key practices, mandatory qualifications, and leadership processes required for school leadership development remain weak in this region (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Hammad & Alazmi, 2020). Third, centralised education systems are prevalent in these Gulf countries, meaning that leaders have insufficient scope to design and implement school improvement initiatives (Alowin, 2020). Fourth, the widespread use of Western leadership concepts in education may be inappropriate in the Gulf context, meaning that the curriculum for leadership development does not reflect the contexts and cultures prevalent in this region (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Hammad & Alazmi, 2020).

This review of the literature identifies a wider research gap that concerns the whole Gulf and the wider Arab region (Hammad et al., 2023b). For example, Karami-Akkary and Hammad (2019) point to the challenges facing Arab educational leadership and management scholars in building a culturally sensitive knowledge base. They call for

Arab researchers to conduct more empirical studies on how Arab school principals develop school leadership skills, arguing that little research exists on this topic (Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). Newer studies have contributed to the existing knowledge base, but they are not enough to inform effective principal leadership policies (Hammad & Alazmi, 2020; Hammad et al., 2023a). Research on school principals is needed to understand how these professionals are prepared and empowered, how effective they are at their jobs, what challenges they encounter, and how to support them (Hammad & Alazmi, 2020). Research on the Gulf states is also required to balance the existing dominance of Western-based studies and to create a corpus of knowledge that could be applied in non-Western settings (Hammad & Alazmi, 2020; Hammad & Al-Harthi, 2021). The aim of the present research is to address these gaps by understanding the perspectives of both providers and participants on how leadership is developed and implemented in Saudi schools.

Although the topic of school leadership in Saudi Arabia attracts much attention from policymakers (Alyami & Floyd, 2019; Bentahar et al., 2021; OECD, 2020) and scholars (Ahmed et al., 2022), empirical research on this issue is scarce, particularly when it comes to evaluating stakeholders' perceptions (Alharbi, 2021; Alnasser, 2023). There are very few studies that assess the state of leadership development in Saudi schools. The most up-to-date studies, such as the analysis of leadership styles and outcomes of high-school leaders conducted by Alhuzaim et al. (2022) or the analysis of leadership styles by Alrajeh (2022), are not focused on leadership preparation, so they are insufficient to provide a clear picture of the problem. There is also a lack of research on Najran schools, which is a significant gap because the findings of studies conducted elsewhere may not be generalised to this specific setting. Generalisation is problematic for many reasons, notably that the Ministry of Education has decentralised operational tasks to school districts (Alhuzaim et al., 2022). This means that the implementation of policy, programmes, and planning in the district may vary, and so do leadership preparation and development.

In addition, leadership development in centralised educational systems, such as those in the Gulf, has generated limited research. Bush et al. (2018) state that, although there

is significant evidence for the advantageous effects of various modes of leadership in international research and literature, there is much less evidence to support the effectiveness of these modes of leadership in centralised contexts. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the centralised educational systems of the Gulf states and the Arab region, in general, adopt leadership perspectives and approaches adopted from the West (Sellami et al., 2022). As a result of improper interpretation of these Western understandings of leadership and the lack of cultural adaptation, countries of the Arab region demonstrate a significant variation in school leadership preparation (Sellami et al., 2022). Given that Saudi Arabia has a highly centralised educational system that willingly adopts international best practices, there is a need to establish the extent to which leadership is properly adjusted to the cultural milieu of Saudi schools. Toprak et al. (2023) found that research on school leadership in a centralised educational system is different from that in Western settings, which warrants more context-specific research in KSA.

The present author's study can make a significant contribution to the existing knowledge on the state of leadership development in Saudi Arabia. This topic is important because, as stated by Harris and Jones (2019), teacher leadership development is a cornerstone of educational reform and change. With ambitious goals set by Saudi Vision 2030, the Kingdom requires motivated, engaged, and competent leaders willing and able to drive the educational system forward to ensure a sustainable future. By diving deeper into the unique experiences of Saudi school leaders, this study provides the potential to provide research to inform changes in educational policies pertaining to leadership development.

Overview

This chapter reveals some important gaps worth addressing in further research. The review of the available literature published in the Gulf demonstrates that there is limited knowledge of school leadership preparation in this region. Most studies only touch on government policies but overlook the nuances of leadership development, stakeholders' perspectives on them, and the ensuing challenges. There is a disproportionate focus on leadership styles and strategies used in Saudi schools rather than on how aspiring and

current leaders are equipped with the skills and knowledge to meet the stakeholders' expectations. This is particularly true for research focused on Saudi Arabia, which points to the mismatch between ambitious government plans to develop the educational sector and the knowledge base needed to make the existing policies work. There is a need for more empirical evidence on how leadership development is organised, what opportunities exist and whether they are accessible, how well leadership development builds leadership identity, and what role socialisation plays in this process. In other words, more research is required regarding the context and content of leadership development in the Gulf states, and especially in Saudi Arabia.

Another important gap that emerged during this review is the absence of studies on Najran, Saudi Arabia. This large city has a high demand for effective school leadership to govern dozens of private and public schools located there, but there is very limited research focused on this context. Specific research on this city is strongly recommended because of its unique characteristics (for example, that it is a relatively new town with limited human resources). By examining in detail how school leadership preparation occurs in this city, scholars would be better equipped to provide more relevant and meaningful recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, the review identified a surprising gap in knowledge regarding the effectiveness of the Tatweer programme in Saudi Arabia. No published research exists that comprehensively examines how this programme has revolutionised leadership development and what stakeholders themselves think about it. This study seeks to address this gap in research, thus contributing to the existing knowledge and advancing the field of leadership development in this context. The next chapter of the research will provide the methodology, justifying the methodological approach undertaken in this thesis.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This research aims to explore school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia, by answering the following research questions:

1. What is the process of developing school leaders within Najran's educational context?
2. What are the perspectives of both policymakers and participants regarding the strategies and effectiveness of leadership development initiatives?
3. What is the impact of networking and socialisation among teachers on the evolution of leadership capabilities?
4. What is the effect of the Tatweer Programme on shaping leadership development practices in the region?
5. What are the barriers impeding the progress of leadership development efforts in Najran?

This chapter offers an explanation and a justification for the different choices made about aspects of methodology and methods. Firstly, the researcher presents a critical discussion of the research paradigms and explains why he chose interpretivism as a guiding philosophy for this research. Secondly, the chapter presents the different approaches and research strategies that can facilitate social science inquiries, focusing on the inductive research approach and the case study research strategy which were perceived to be the most suitable strategy and approach for this research. Thirdly, this chapter elaborates upon the different research methods, highlighting their respective advantages and disadvantages. The researcher also discusses why semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most suitable instrument for data analysis and how the data were gathered, processed and analysed. The chapter also discusses the specific procedures for selecting the schools and participants who took part in the research. Before concluding, the researcher shows how he has addressed ethical issues.

Research Paradigm

The term research paradigm, though initially originating from the Greek term *paradeigma*, was first employed by Kuhn (1962) to designate a combined cluster of fundamental concepts, variables and issues connected with the related methodological approaches and tools. Guba & Lincoln (1994) define paradigm as a worldview that characterises individuals' position in the world, and the scope of potential relationships to that world and its elements. Thus, paradigm can be defined as the underlying notion that impacts upon researchers' worldviews, defines their viewpoints, and forms their perception of how ideas are linked (Olsen, 2004).

Ontology and epistemology impact on what the researcher perceives as a real phenomenon suitable for scientific investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontological position of the researcher reflects his own understanding of the nature of reality and what data are perceived as real and valid (Wand & Weber, 1993). Epistemology reflects the researcher's understanding about what constitutes valid and reliable knowledge (Hirschheim et al., 1995).

According to Neuman (2000), research paradigms can be classified into four different research philosophies, namely positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and pragmatism. The positivist paradigm holds the view that reality is objective and can be derived using scientific methods that rule out the involvement of human experiences, logic, or interpretation in data analysis (Neuman, 2000). Positivism considers that value-rich knowledge can be produced only if the researcher detaches himself from the research subjects, and positivist researchers employ methods validated in natural science and seeking generalised patterns and truth in the studied phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Thus, those adhering to the positivist research philosophy are able to design rigorous methodologies suitable for producing valid and reliable data, but might not always capture the nuances individuals attribute to their social reality (Paul, 2005; Saunders et al., 2012). The positivist approach cannot be used in this study as exploring the process and practices related to school leadership requires conducting social research, which involves understanding the human experiences and their interpretations of how leadership development occurs in practice. For that reason, this

research adopts the interpretivist stance, which holds that reality is subjective and is a socially constructed process that is derived from interpretations and observations.

The research philosophy of pragmatism advocates that researchers need to set aside the ontological and epistemological debates and embrace those methods that work best for the research (Weaver, 2018). The pragmatic paradigm also advocates that reality is produced and influenced by human actions, and it is, hence, constantly altering based on individual experiences (Morgan, 2014). The paradigm of pragmatism is open to adopting various research approaches and tends to advocate mixed-methods research (Feilzer, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; Weaver, 2018). However, the use of pragmatist philosophy can undermine the theoretical foundation of the research as the philosophy cannot be employed in cases where the quantitative and the qualitative components of the study depend on theoretical propositions that cannot be reconciled (Hampson and McKinley, 2023).

The pragmatist adoption of mixed-methods research could enrich this study by providing a more panoramic view of the leadership development landscape in Saudi Arabia (Shorten & Smith, 2017). However, it would require more extensive data collection and analysis, which could be problematic due to time and resource limitations.

Critical theory is another important paradigm, and according to Horkheimer (1982), critical theory aims for human emancipation, seeking to liberate individuals from the conditions that oppress them. According to Bohman (2005), an adequate critical theory adheres to the following three criteria. These are to clarify what is wrong with the present social reality, to find the action to change it, and to offer clear standards for criticism and transformation. A notable strength of the critical theory paradigm is that it links theory and practice, aiming to pursue actual change from hypothetical development, thus seeking positive social change instead of looking for prediction and control or description and understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). The critical theory positions research in relation to social justice and aims to address social and political oppression (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Interpretivist research is based on subjectivist ontology, according to which there are multiple interpretations of reality (Patton, 2002) which can be constructed by obtaining

meanings from the research participants, often by conducting interviews, which are utilised in this research to obtain answers to the research questions. The interpretivist school posits that social science research must go forward, overcome the limitations of positivism and aim to provide an in-depth exploration of the way individuals work, interact and shape their reality (Maxwell, 2013; Bachman and Schutt, 2008). Thus, knowledge, according to interpretivism, is seen as socially produced and inherently bound to the way individuals have constructed it (Saunders et al. 2012, Creswell 2014). However, by breaking with the positivist understanding of knowledge, interpretivism lacks the scientific rigour of the latter, thus producing narrow insights valid only for a limited number of cases and individuals (Schutt, 2001). Interpretivists, however, counter this point by arguing that research results are not universal and claiming objectivity in research findings shows that researchers are not aware of their own biases and miscalculations (Bachman and Schutt, 2008). Instead, all knowledge exists within a specific context and is thus a part of larger social processes (Bryman 2012). In this regard, interpretivists provide a critique of positivism, arguing that positivist knowledge is socially constructed as well, and fails to account for its scientific shortcomings.

The adoption of the interpretivist paradigm is considered most suitable for the present project as its purpose is to comprehend and interpret policymakers' and participants' perspectives on school leadership development in Saudi Arabia. The interpretivist paradigm is embraced because of its relativist ontology, which posits that reality emerges through inter-subjective construction via socially and experientially developed meanings and understandings. (Schutz, 1962). The interpretivist paradigm was also chosen because it embraces a proposition that all participants have their own interpretations of reality, providing various worldviews, which enable the researcher to explore the research questions from different perspectives and angles. The adoption of the interpretivist paradigm is also justified due to the research methods that interpretivist philosophy embraces, which are naturalistic in character (Angen, 2000). Indeed, the purpose of interpretivist research is to develop a dialogue between the researcher and participants to construct a meaningful reality (Weaver, 2018) collectively. Lastly, the use of the interpretivist paradigm is justified as it assumes that meanings are derived from the research process (Angen, 2000). This research is based on the meanings,

experiences, and interpretations of participants, emerging from the research process itself.

Research Approach

There are two mainstream approaches used in social science research to guide the research process: the deductive approach and the inductive approach. The deductive approach is grounded in the tradition of natural sciences and the philosophy of positivism, which is focused on theory development and theory testing (Saunders et al. 2012). Therefore, the main focus of adopting a deductive approach is developing a specific predictive framework, which can then be tested again by real-world data (Collis and Hussey, 2001). Creswell and Clark (2007, p.23) argue that a "deductive researcher works a 'top-down' framework theorising on the data, either to add or contradict a theory". As a result, the deductive approach is often criticised by inductive researchers for restricting the development of alternative interpretations and meanings (Saunders et al. 2012). According to Marshall (1997), deductive approaches can be best used to study topics in mature research fields where there is a sufficient body of workable theories and hypotheses which can be readily tested. However, Adams et al. (2007) highlight that there might be inherent fallacies in deductive reasoning, such as the tendency of "affirming the consequent," commonly encountered in theory validation because erroneous assumptions made during hypothesis formulation may lead to misleading inferences. Another notable limitation of deductive reasoning is that it is inherently reductionist in its scope and methods, as the purpose of deductive research is to validate or test a theory rather than to develop new theories and new understandings (Schutt 2001). Not surprisingly, deductive approaches are not recommended to support theory development in emerging fields of study as positivism struggles to produce theoretical explanations in areas where strong and established theories are lacking (Schutt 2001).

The inductive approach, on the other hand, is centered on the premise that deductive theory testing restricts the depth of the investigation by limiting the research to an examination of only a narrow set of variables. In turn, inductive researchers suggest that a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon can be gained only if one gathers

and analyses the data and then constructs a theory that best explains the collected data (Saunders et al., 2012). Inductive researchers begin the research process from the bottom up by gathering the relevant data and then using the data to construct a theory that best accounts for the real-life observations they have accumulated. With inductive reasoning, the researcher strives to "get a feeling of what is going on" to understand better the issue(s) surrounding a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2012, p.125). As such, an inductive approach holds an explanatory value and is suitable for gathering and analysing data without depending on predetermined predictive frameworks. It is also useful for revising a predictive framework one begins with.

Furthermore, the inductive approach is well-suited to acknowledging that there are a wide variety of variables influencing the development of a given social phenomenon, whose prediction cannot be made in advance (Easterby-Smith et al. 2020). Nonetheless, one of the criticisms of the inductive approach is that the results from inductive research lack generalisation (Gilbert and Stoneman, 2015). Inductive research is also accused of failing to produce results with a strong theoretical foundation, as inductive reasoning aims to arrive at a theory from the data rather than to use an already developed theory to guide the research. Such a process might result in the production of data that does not have relevance to the established theories (Creswell and Clark 2007).

Considering the strengths and limitations of both inductive and deductive reasoning, the researcher considers that inductive reasoning is more suitable for addressing the objectives of the study. There is no established theory or explanation on how school leadership development should be conducted and organised in the Gulf region. Although the literature review has acknowledged a number of relevant constructs that influence leadership development practice, those constructs cannot be tested through the structured approaches utilised by deductive scholars. Furthermore, understanding how policymakers and teachers understand, interpret, and approach their leadership development practice is a highly contextualised issue whose outcome cannot be predicted through deductive hypothesis, requiring it to be investigated through inductive methodologies. Inductive methodologies are also recommended as the researcher is

interested in developing an explanation that can account for the specific factors influencing leadership development practices in Saudi Arabia, an underdeveloped research context for school leadership development.

Research Strategy

A research approach is defined as a strategy and process for performing research which encompasses the wide-ranging beliefs underlying comprehensive methods of data collection, evaluation, and explanation (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) presents five research approaches linked to qualitative methodology: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

The author decided to use a case study approach, which is a strategy capable of exploring real-life issues and phenomena, along with the contexts in which they occur, by relying on multiple sources of data and evidence (Yin 2013). Case study strategies assist researchers not only in examining contemporary problems but also in producing new insights into the complexities of real-life settings that go beyond the capabilities of both experimental and survey strategies (Zainal 2007). The case study's notable advantage is that it uses a holistic, rather than a reductionist, approach, which helps the researcher to produce findings that link to the political or social context (Verschuren 2003). Another notable advantage of a case-study strategy is the breadth of research instruments that can be utilised during the data collection process, since a case study is not confined to employing a single method for data collection but can combine different methodologies, approaches and data sources (Cronin 2014). Unlike survey research, whose inflexible measures and instruments fail to capture the complexities embedded in real-life interactions, or to retrieve implicit perceptions and experiences, case studies can produce insights through a comprehensive examination of human experiences (Hosseini, Dehkord and Aghapour, 2012). The case study aims to produce a comprehensive description of the research participants' perspectives, and it is useful when one phenomenon needs to be explored from the viewpoints of different stakeholders (Saracho 2014). Furthermore, "If case researchers master their case method, a fruitful source of theory and results would result—and perhaps a different worldview" (Cutler, 2004, p.374).

Even though a case study has pronounced advantages, it is not devoid of limitations, especially in relation to the external validity of the findings derived from case study investigations. Any conclusions obtained through case study research can only be applied to the case itself, with limited analytical generalisation of findings (Saunders et al. 2012; Zainal, 2007). Case studies do not adhere to a structured framework for data collection and analysis and, as a consequence, they might suffer from analytical and methodological gaps (Yin, 2009). However, the above-mentioned limitations, related to the external validity of case study research, can be partially overcome by conducting multiple case study research and selecting more than one unit for analysis.

The researcher used a case study because it is appropriate to address a notable research gap in school leadership development in Saudi Arabia. Yin (2009; 2013) maintains that case study methodology is valuable for adding new knowledge and perspectives by giving insights into specific research settings. It is also praised for helping researchers to analyse how different contextual factors interact with each other in the target setting. As such, it helps to determine how specific phenomena (in this case, leadership development) respond to various policy, professional, social, and other factors (Yin, 2009; 2013). According to Erickson and Wentworth (2010), excessive reliance on quantitative data fails to explain educators' real experiences in schools, whereas the case study approach is a better fit for exploring the challenges they face. Given these advantages, the case study approach is helpful in understanding school leadership development in Saudi Arabia.

A multiple case study design was employed to give the researcher an opportunity to contrast individual school settings, represent a diversity of participant experiences to create depth, and understand the broad phenomenon of leadership development without losing the individuality of the single case studies (Adams et al., 2022; Bassey, 2012). A multiple case study design also helped the researcher to better depict the complexity of school dynamics that are difficult to isolate from the unique context of time and place (Adams et al., 2022; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Thus, it was possible to create a more convincing explanation of leadership development because the findings are more intensely grounded in several sources of empirical evidence (Gustafsson, 2017).

Although a multiple case study approach has certain limitations, such as time-consuming data collection and analysis, this approach can provide rich evidence that enhances the credibility and validity of the overall findings (Creswell, 2003). Another benefit of employing a multiple case study approach is that the extensive evidence allows for the analytical generalisation of findings (that is, generalising from individual experiences to the broader educational context), thus enhancing the external validity of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Four schools from Najran, Saudi Arabia, were chosen as relevant case studies for the project due to my distinctive positionality. This term is defined as “the researcher’s position in relationship to three areas: the topic under investigation; the research participants; and the research design, context and process” (Wilson et al., 2022, p. 45). Certain aspects of my positionality, such as my personal life history and educational experiences working in public schools, made me curious about the ways educators’ leadership capacity can be enhanced. My interest in school leadership initiatives conducted in the selected region also determined the selection of the topic. Furthermore, I am a former school leader in this city who had multiple opportunities to participate in the programmes and initiatives for promoting leadership development. Those programmes and initiatives helped me to build personal connections with the trainers and experts from the Ministry of Education who are responsible for designing and conducting leadership development interventions. In this way, through my experience formed by insider positionality, I consider myself part of the community within which I am conducting research (Wilson et al., 2022). The final aspect of positionality requires recognising that research is necessarily influenced by the research context (Holmes, 2020).

Research Methods

Research methods denote different approaches used by researchers to collect data and to generate implications, explanations, analyses and projections related to the problem being investigated (Saunders et al. 2012). Researchers who use qualitative methodology usually adopt observations, documentary analysis, and interviews when

collecting data to gather evidence and to understand the viewpoints of participants from different contextual backgrounds (Bryman, 2013).

Documentary analysis was not feasible for this study because school-based documents were not available to the researcher online. The planned observations could not be undertaken due to COVID-19-related restrictions. Therefore, the given study employs interviews, which are the most suitable method of looking into unique participants' lived experiences and examining the topic from their perspective (Coleman, 2012). Since this study sought to explore the perspectives of both policymakers and participants regarding the strategies and effectiveness of leadership development initiatives, interviews were selected as the optimal research method. Interviews were also chosen for this study because they allow one to gain insights into a particular problem without requiring advanced methodological and statistical analysis skills (Coleman, 2012). Common limitations associated with interviews include the lack of representativeness, bias, and replicability issues, but these should not deter scholars from employing this research method if it suits the research aims and if the potential advantages outweigh the weaknesses (Knott et al., 2022). Indeed, Cronin (2014) suggests that case-study research may utilise multiple methods for data collection. However, qualitative research designs can rely on a mono-method to collect data (Sounders et al., 2016, p.168), provided the chosen method is the most suitable to answer the set research questions and that the researcher masters the chosen method.

Primary data collection can be conducted through surveys or interviews. While surveys are easier and cheaper to conduct, thus being able to cover a larger sample, interviews provide more in-depth insights (Saunders et al. 2012). Interviews can be divided into three different types: closed/structured, open/unstructured, and semi-structured. A structured interview usually has predefined questions, generally in a predefined order, and is frequently used in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2014). One notable advantage of structured interviews is the consistency of answers, as the rigid interview schedule facilitates the gathering of easy-to-analyse and comparable datasets (Johnson and Christensen 2006). However, that easy-to-analyse dataset is achieved by sacrificing flexibility and full details in the answers (Adams et al. 2007). In structured interviews, the

conversation is narrowly constructed along the predefined interview schedule from which the researcher cannot deviate. Not surprisingly, such interviews are accused of providing artificial answers and preventing the researcher from establishing effective rapport with the participants and from probing them extensively on the topic of interest (Saunders et al. 2012). The inherent limitations of structured interviews make them incompatible with the objective of data collection for this study, where authenticity of data is sought, so this interview type was not selected for the study.

Unstructured interviews, in turn, are the opposite of structured interviews as the researcher does not have any predefined schedule to follow during the interview but instead improvises most of the questions as the interview progresses (Bryman and Bell 2007). Unstructured interviews are mainly participant-led, and those interviews provide the greatest opportunity for the participants to express themselves and to share their opinions (Schutt 2001). The duration of the unstructured interview may be quite long, as such conversations provide extensive, qualitative, but difficult-to-analyse, data. The interviewers complete such interviews without a predefined schedule, and as a result, there might be little in common between the individual interviews, which makes them really challenging to analyse (Mangal and Mangal 2007). The quality of the data obtained from unstructured interviews has also become a subject of criticism. Although the unstructured approach can help the researcher to obtain much more authentic data than structured interviews, the interview process is much more time consuming, and as a result, participant fatigue can occur (Saunders et al. 2012). The lack of an interview schedule might result in the researcher losing control of the interview process, and the answers obtained may not enable the researcher to achieve the stated research objectives (Robson, 2011). Those limitations make unstructured interviews unsuitable for this project.

Semi-structured interviews are adopted for this study, because they combine the strengths of both structured and unstructured interviews and thus transcend some of their limitations (Coleman, 2012; Scott, 2012). According to Robson and McCartan (2016), semi-structured interviews have an interview guide that is predefined but composed of open-ended questions whose sequence can be amended based on

respondents' answers (Bryman and Bell 2007). Semi-structured interviews can also rely upon probes and prompts, such as repeating the interviewee's words, outlining the main concept or communicating interest with verbal agreement (Kallio et al., 2016). The use of prompts encourages the interviewees to provide a more detailed response by thinking more about the question (Hatch, 2002). The use of probes enables the interviewees to elaborate more on the initial response and thus explore the research topic in more detail (Hatch, 2002). The researcher also has the flexibility to add new questions during the interview process as the research schedule is amenable to change (Johnson and Christensen 2006). According to Creswell (2014), the inclusion of an amendable interview schedule allows the researcher to understand the respondents' answers better and to clarify potential ambiguities, especially in cases where the same idea is understood differently between the researcher and the participant. Furthermore, by offering a more flexible structure, interviews of the semi-structured type support researchers' efforts in building rapport with the participants (Bryman 2014). Lastly, semi-structured interviews are not as time- and resource-intensive as unstructured ones, which helps the researcher obtain material of higher quality and reduce interviewee fatigue (Saunders et al. 2012).

The literature recommends the conduct of face-to-face interviews over online interviews as they provide greater control over the environment in which the interviews are conducted and reduce potential distractions (Curasi 2001). Participant rapport is also established more easily through direct communication with research subjects, who might also be willing to disclose sensitive issues through direct communication rather than during an online interview (Curasi 2001). However, face-to-face interviews could not be practically conducted for this study as the data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic when social distancing protocols were in place. All interviews were carried out remotely, with Zoom being used as software to facilitate the interaction with the research subjects. In retrospect, the researcher believed that the online data collection was a better option not only as it reduced the health risks participants faced but also because online interviews are done in an environment in which participants feel at ease (most commonly their homes), which encouraged self-reflexivity and interactivity (Madge et al., 2004). Still, online interviews do not provide sufficient information about

situational understanding as the researcher could not be in the same environment as the research participants, so some contextual data might have been lost during the interview process.

Sampling

According to Fowler (2002), sampling is the process of choosing participants, and a sound sampling strategy enhances research validity. For this project, four secondary schools for boys from Najran were chosen as case studies due to the researcher's experience working in the secondary education setting and the ensuing interest in leadership development in secondary schools. Participants were sampled purposively based on their locations in urban and suburban areas of Najran. No rural school was chosen, as there are few secondary schools in the remote areas of Najran, and those schools tend to have fewer students and teachers. Two schools from the urban area of Najran and two schools from the suburban areas of Najran were selected to ensure that both urban and suburban areas were equally represented in the sample. The difference between the urban and suburban areas of Najran is that suburban areas are located in the suburbs and have a lower population density than the urban areas. The inclusion of both urban and suburban schools was helpful in ensuring that the study could account for leadership development practices in both geographical contexts. In addition, the sample included two schools involved in the Tatweer programme and two that remained outside it so that the researcher could examine the contribution of the Tatweer programme to leadership development practices. In this way, sampling was stratified as well as purposive. Sampling was also influenced by the need to secure access from the Najran City Office.

The participants were chosen via a non-random sampling technique, which, although less representative of the population, allows the researcher to analyse the experience and perceptions of individuals with relevant knowledge about school leadership development. Purposive sampling was adopted as the researcher used his judgment to determine which participants were most suitable for addressing the research questions (Saunders et al., 2013). Although such a sampling technique cannot generate a statistically representative sample, the researcher's aim was not to select a

representative sample but one that can provide information-rich data on the issues being explored. The sampling process prioritised those individuals who had first-hand experience of the available training and courses for school leadership. In selecting the participants, the researcher ensured that both senior and junior teachers were included in the sample.

Twenty-eight participants (principals, senior teachers and junior teachers) were selected to participate in the four case-study schools. In each school, the researcher selected the principal, three senior teachers, and three junior teachers to capture the potential differences in their attitudes and experiences. Principals, acted as gatekeepers, provided the researcher with details of senior and junior teachers who met the inclusion criteria. Although gatekeeping was crucial for achieving the research goals, it is important to acknowledge that it might have introduced a certain degree of bias in participant selection, which could have affected the study's trajectory and data quality and validity (Christian et al., 2021; Reeves, 2010). Five participants from the Najran Education Administration (three Deputy Directors of Secondary Schools (Najran) and two Assistant Directors of Secondary Schools (Najran), were sampled purposively based on their positions to provide a policy perspective. Two training managers from the local training centre were also included in this study, to offer a provider perspective, a total of 35 participants. These participants were chosen because they participate in setting teacher leadership development goals, developing leadership training content, delivering training, etc., so their opinions and insights were needed to understand how leadership development is perceived by major decision-makers. The teachers chosen to participate in the study taught three disciplines: Arabic language, English language and mathematics. Those three subjects were chosen because they are central to the curriculum in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, there is a widely shared perception in Saudi Arabia that teachers in languages and mathematics prefer the teaching profession over the other career paths available to them and that those individuals are going to remain in the profession (Almulla, 2020; Hogg et al., 2023). Thus, their interest in leadership development may be higher.

The justification for including principals in this study is that they are viewed as the educational leaders in Saudi schools, and their perspectives can provide significant insights into the current state of leadership practices and how these practices can be developed further to support school improvement initiatives (Almudarra, 2017). Principals can also provide insights into the leadership preparation (planned or inadvertent) they received before or after assuming their leadership positions.

The inclusion criteria for the study were that each participant has at least two years of experience working as a teacher in Najran and be currently employed as either a junior or senior teacher, or as a principal, in one of the four case study schools. To help validity, participants whom the researcher knew beforehand (including his friends, acquaintances and relatives) were excluded from participating in the research. The justification for including senior and junior teachers is to assess if there are differences in their responses, based on their different experiences of working in schools. While senior teachers had more opportunities to participate in leadership development interventions than junior teachers, the latter had an equally important role in this study. Their insights provided information about the recent and contemporary practices for leadership development in Saudi Arabia. The inclusion of these three groups also helps to triangulate their views about the nature of leadership in their schools. The justification for including deputy directors and assistant directors from the Secondary Schools Directorate, Najran, is that these are the officials responsible for leadership development provision. Lastly, the justification for including providers from the local training centre is to explore which training programmes are offered by the training centre to develop school leadership in Najran and to establish providers' perceptions about the nature and impact of such training.

Instrument Design and Data Collection

Interview guides are necessary for conducting semi-structured interviews, as they give each conversation a direction and allow the collection of relevant data. According to McGrath et al. (2019), semi-structured interview guides must include a set of predetermined main questions, complemented with probes. The latter are needed to dig deeper into the participants' responses through follow-up questions. Following the

recommendation of McGrath et al. (2019), the researcher began the interview guides with some background questions to set the tone for the interviews. Subsequent questions were each informed by the research questions, to elicit relevant data.

According to Creswell (2014), data collection involves how data are collected, how relevant permissions are obtained, how data are recorded and stored, and how ethical issues are addressed when collecting data. Following ethical approval, the consent forms and participant information sheets were sent to all participants to ensure they fully understood what was expected of them in the interviews. After informed consent was obtained, and the date and time of the interview agreed, the researcher sent a Zoom link to each participant. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, subject to approval from the participants, and recordings were transcribed on the same day as the interviews.

Interviews were conducted in Arabic because this is the first language of the participants, who were able to speak freely. A two-stage translation process was used. Initially, interviews conducted in Arabic were transcribed verbatim, involving pauses, emotional manifestations, and interpretations. Second, the quotes that the researcher planned to use in the thesis as the most insightful and informative were translated into English. The translated versions were examined and re-examined whilst collating and evaluating the data to improve the credibility of the research results.

Data Analysis

Yin (2003) outlines three primary strategies for analysing evidence in case studies. These strategies depend on hypothetical propositions, thinking about contrasting explanations, and generating a case description. For this study, each case will be analysed separately, followed by cross-case analysis. Such an approach is suitable for this study as it applies to the analysis of multiple cases. The use of multiple cases offers more robust findings than a single case.

Creswell (2014) states that data analysis is the choice of methods and approaches which includes describing, explaining and deciphering research data. Data were analysed in three stages. The first stage involved transcribing the interviews of each

case study school. Namely, the interviews were recorded (the interviewees granted their approval to have the interviews recorded), and further transcribed. The process of analysing the qualitative data was grounded in the following analytical hierarchy – preparation of data for analysis, transcription, data management, descriptive accounts, and explanatory accounts (Spencer et al., 2003). Data management, in turn, involved ordering and reducing the initial mass of data to their core meanings, leading to the identification of key themes and ideas "according to which the data are labelled, sorted and synthesised" (Spencer et al., 2003, p.214). The data were analysed through manual coding as described in Basit (2003). The manual coding of interview data involved several systematic steps. First, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews into written text to ensure that the interview data was adequately captured. Then, he read through the transcripts multiple times to familiarize himself with the data itself and how the different respondents approached the same issues. Next, the researcher identified key themes, patterns, within the text and assign codes to these elements. After the initial coding was done, the researcher revised the coding scheme once against and organised the codes into categories.

In this regard, data management was carried out manually by identifying recurrent themes arising from participants' responses. Adhering to respondents' terms and perspectives is a matter of utmost importance at that point since the actual words used by the interviewees, and the substantive content of their accounts, along with the assigned meanings, are instrumental in capturing the richness of their perceptions about the phenomenon. The third stage involved a thematic cross-case comparison. To conduct cross-case analysis, I first selected a diverse sample of schools from whom data has been collected. Each case was analysed individually to identify key themes, patterns, and unique factors explaining the school leadership development. Following this, I used a comparative approach to systematically examine similarities and differences across cases. This involved coding the data from each case and organising it into categories. Throughout the process, careful attention was paid to both convergent and divergent findings, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study. This iterative method enabled the researcher to draw robust conclusions by triangulating evidence from multiple data sources.

Ethics

Ethical considerations must be addressed by researchers, and a particular ethical code should be followed to ensure that research complies with ethical guidelines (Cohen et al., 2017; Robson, 2011). The ethical guidelines outlined in the British Educational Research Association standards (BERA) and The University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (2023) were adopted in this research. Data collection started only once ethical approval had been granted by the University of Nottingham.

The following ethical procedures were followed in this research. Firstly, the researcher ensured that no harm was caused to anyone during the research process (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). One of the ways to achieve this was to prioritise the right of privacy over the right to know (defended on the basis of benefits to society) in case these came into conflict (Sanjari et al., 2014). The researcher also did not pose any sensitive questions that could potentially lead to negative repercussions for participants in their workplace.

Secondly, consent was obtained from all participants after providing them with detailed information about the study's purpose, the researcher's role, and what was expected from them (Cohen et al., 2017). Participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of their involvement through careful explanation of the process, their right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance that their data would not be used if they chose to withdraw. Thirdly, the researcher ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and the information they provided, were maintained (Cohen et al., 2017). Participants were informed that any information they provided would be kept fully confidential; no names, designations, or school-specific information would be revealed in the final study (Briggs et al., 2012). Only pseudonyms were used in the final report, and all participants were assured that data provided by them would be stored in a password-protected computer to which only the researcher has access. If the participants happened to reveal any information that might lead to their potential identification, that information would have been subsequently removed from the final

report and not disclosed to the wider audience. Thus, the anonymity and confidentiality of all research subjects was ensured.

In collecting and storing the data, the researcher followed the 2018 Data Protection Act. All participant information sheets and consent forms were stored separately in a password-protected device, the key to which is only known by the researcher. In line with the University of Nottingham Records Retention Schedule (2023., p.21), the policy of retention for research project files envisages a retention period of a minimum of seven years after closure. No data collected for the research would be shared with other researchers and third parties, although some limited exceptions were made for the study's supervisors and examiners. The researcher provided the participants with opportunities to ask questions relating to their participation. The researcher ensured that the participants were fully informed about their rights and responsibilities and that they participated voluntarily in the study. No participants exercised their right to withdraw from the study.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research, like any other type of research, has its own quality criteria, subjecting its methodology to scrutiny (Briggs et al., 2012). One such criterion, validity, generally refers to the integrity and application of the chosen methods and the accuracy with which the presented results reflect the data. However, some scholars argue that this inherently quantitative notion is not very applicable to qualitative studies, where trustworthiness is commonly used as a more suitable alternative (Stahl and King, 2020). Aspects of trustworthiness that are typically employed in qualitative studies include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stahl and King, 2020).

In this research, credibility, understood as the degree to which the findings are congruent with reality, was achieved through member checking (Cohen et al., 2017). The researcher sent interview transcripts for review to the participants to ensure that the data were recorded properly and to allow them to clarify or modify their statements if necessary (Stahl and King, 2020). This 'member checking' process helped to reduce the possibility of misrepresentation during data analysis (McKim, 2023). The responses

received from participants included some minor clarifications, but these did not significantly change the data.

Transferability of the findings was achieved by providing thick descriptions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher also complied with the dependability principle by engaging in reflexive practice – acknowledging one's role in data collection and analysis. Reflexivity was achieved through establishing one's positionality, that is, engaging in a self-consciousness analysis of one's views, experiences and positions and how these might, directly and indirectly, influence the research design and interpretation of the research findings (Holmes, 2020). In order to minimise the risk of bias due to the insider role that the researcher adopted in this study, the analysis of the findings did not consider the researcher's unique experiences with leadership development but relied solely on the collected data. Finally, the notion of confirmability was respected by creating an audit trail that recorded the process of data analysis (Cohen et al., 2017).

To enhance the validity of the research, the researcher relied on triangulating information from different sources. Namely, data was collected from both junior and senior teachers, from trainers and policy-makers to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. While triangulation of methods could not be performed for the study as the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to collect observational data and documentary data, the researcher perceives that by collecting data from 35 different participants has offered the required depth and breadth of insights to enhance the validity of the research.

Overview

This chapter presents a detailed justification of each methodological choice made to answer the research questions. It depicts interpretivism as the most suitable research philosophy, allowing the researcher to gain insights into participants' unique experiences. The chapter also explains why the inductive research approach was prioritised, given the lack of research on school leadership development in Saudi Arabia. It also outlines the case study research strategy as the most suitable in the given context because it helped in-depth exploration of leadership development in the four specific school settings. Additionally, the researcher listed the advantages of semi-

structured interviews, such as flexibility, ease of use, and ability to collect rich but consistent data. Sampling, data collection, and data analysis processes were also discussed, along with ethical principles of protection from harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection. Before concluding, the researcher reflected on how the principle of trustworthiness was respected by meeting the requirements for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The findings derived from the methodology followed in this study is presented in the next 4 chapters with the discussion starting with school A presented in the chapter below.

The next chapter presents the findings from the first school-based case study.

Chapter Four: Findings Case Study A

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with seven practitioners in a school in Najran, to understand their perspectives on how leadership is developed and implemented in Saudi schools. Najran is a city in the southwest of Saudi Arabia, close to the border with Yemen. School A is located in an urban area of Najran. It was established in 1966 and has 25 teachers and 406 students. This school is included in the Tatweer leadership programme run by the Saudi government. The Tatweer initiative was set up in 2007 to transform and improve the quality of education, with a focus on encouraging distributed leadership practices with more decision-making authority given to the schools (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). The interviewees from School A, with pseudonyms, are given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: School A participants

Name	Position	Experience	School
Ali	Principal	10 years as head	A
Bader	Senior English teacher	15 years	A
Rami	Junior English teacher	3 years	A
Asad	Junior Arabic teacher	2 years	A
Amar	Junior Maths teacher	4 years	A
Karam	Senior Maths teacher	10 years	A
Saif	Senior Arabic teacher	12 years	A

From the responses received, certain patterns emerged, and these are presented in this chapter as themes that are perceived to be important to the participants. It was anticipated that themes linked to the research questions would relate to training, support, and socialisation, but there was not a strong pattern linked to support, so this

theme was discarded, although it could be interpreted under the networking theme. Six themes emerged from the data:

- Self-development
- Networking and communication
- Training
- The Tatweer programme
- Socialisation
- Barriers to leadership development.

The six main themes are discussed below in sequence, starting with self-development.

Self-development

Walker and Reichard (2020, p.27) define leadership self-development as a process of “purposefully engaging in autonomous and self-regulated growth”, which is juxtaposed with formal leadership training. Participants were asked to consider leadership development in Najran. Leadership development has been described as a process that leads to continuous personal growth, and five of the seven participants discussed the concept of self-development. These include all senior staff, while the two who did not mention self-development were both junior teachers.

Self-development for leadership was highlighted by principal Ali, who believes that *‘the school principal should already be self-developed to keep up with current educational developments. From my own point of view, leadership development starts with self-development’*. He adds that the current move towards more e-learning means the principal needs to be aware of such developments, otherwise he will not be in a position to lead others. It is the school principal who has the opportunity to make any changes and he should be leading by example, according to Ali, who has been on the Tatweer leadership programme for three years (see below). Although he feels that he did not learn anything from the Tatweer programme, Ali suggested that there were other development courses *‘which all school principals can benefit from and which I*

conducted for some colleagues'. This suggests that Ali is cascading his own knowledge of leadership practices.

'Development is urgent and necessary for the school principal because it is he who makes the changes in the school or the educational organisation, and he is the one who urges and encourages teachers to be developed, and thus transfers development to the whole organisation and all people working in the school, also to students.' (Ali)

This was supported by Bader, the most experienced teacher among these participants, who reinforced the need for leaders to *'first seek to develop oneself and then those around him and then the educational faculty he leads'*. One of the ways in which this could be done, according to Saif, a senior teacher, is *'self-development through discussion with previous principals'*. All three of these participants recognised the need for principals to have more knowledge than their colleagues and to be able to cascade that knowledge through the organisation, to improve educational practice throughout the school.

However, the main issue with self-development can be that some school principals are unwilling to change, according to Bader, although he was not referring to this case-study school.

'The issue is the school principal being unwilling to develop oneself or do the required reading and research to gain beneficial knowledge or to keep abreast of the latest developments in the field of education, whether in KSA or abroad, while being more inclined to delegate his responsibilities to others.' (Bader)

Karam reports that he has had no training for leadership, despite the school being involved in the Tatweer programme and being in charge of the school principal development programme in the school, but he believes in self-development for school principals: *'Development is a necessity and I think they should develop themselves by their own selves. They set a development plan to develop themselves and develop their schools'*.

Karam had undertaken five online training courses, which he felt had helped him develop enough to become a school principal, although they were of short duration, and he would have benefited from longer courses. Saif, the other senior teacher with a similar number of years of experience, had also not received any training for school leadership through the Tatweer programme, and he was more inclined to regard self-development as '*reading and having conscious knowledge*'. He was also unaware of the Tatweer programme in the school.

Apart from the two most junior teachers, the other five participants strongly supported self-development as a process through which one can lead effectively. It was regarded as a way of being aware and cascading new knowledge throughout the school. Ali, the principal, had been on the Tatweer leadership programme and yet did not feel he had gained new knowledge from the experience, which may account for the other participants promoting self-development as a way of developing leadership skills.

Networking and Communication

Interpersonal communication skills are important for the development of leaders and five of the seven participants recognised this. These are all three junior teachers, Asad, Amar and Rami, as well as Ali, principal, and Saif, a senior teacher.

Asad, one of the junior teachers, believes that school principals can be developed through networking and exchanging ideas and practices with others.

'So they can exchange experiences and information, they brainstorm and study altogether how to implement development in schools, so that the model schools are the first to implement developments. Because school principals are working in the field and they are more familiar with all details and they are the most knowledgeable, and experiences can be gained from their field studies, information and opinions.' (Asad)

According to Asad, the school principals are the ones most able to inform other school leaders as they have the experience. Networking with other principals would enable ideas and experiences to be shared, and Ali confirms this: '*The exchange of experiences is one of the most important things that can develop the school principal*'.

Ali indicates that it is not just networking with other principals that is regarded as vital for developing leaders. Communicating with others is viewed as important for school principals, as this can dictate the future relationship with the teachers and set out a strategy for everyone to understand. Rami, a junior teacher, supports this, suggesting that staff depend on their school principal for guidance and affirming that this was how the school principal could develop and improve: '*The leader must explain to workers what they are required to do and how the work will proceed*' (Rami). There is an indication that Rami experiences this in School A as he adds that teachers would not continue to work in a school where this flow of information was not happening. The relationship between the school principal and teachers can affect the whole organisational system and can have a significant impact on development, as Asad, another junior teacher, suggests in response to the question about the school principal's development:

'If there is a non-cooperative teacher, that is what I consider as a priority, because it may affect the whole working system, and can cause a learning gap, also this can cause some embarrassment for the principal from other teachers, some waiting classes, arguments, and there may be absence, and this harms work.' (Asad)

Teachers want their principals to provide guidance and to be there for them when needed, therefore good communication channels are essential. Different perspectives have been sought in this study and a junior teacher, such as Asad, recognises the impact of good communication between teachers and the school principal on the whole school structure, as in school A. The principal enables networking, and his input has an impact on younger members of staff, as Asad indicates.

'I think that the school principal is the only reason for my productivity, my good relations with my colleagues, my evaluation and my way of dealing with students, I think he is a protective cover for me against problems. The school principal when he talks to teachers, they feel much comfortable, he says "I am here for you, if anything happens be sure that I will support you, don't worry about this at all". You know that the school principal is like a camera monitoring everything,

like mistakes and aggressiveness when dealing with students which leads to problems and complaints. The experienced school principal is successful, I was greatly influenced by the school principal, and I spoke frankly with him and with others.' (Asad).

Asad views a school principal as someone who protects him if things go wrong, and this form of protection needs open communication between them. The networking that the school principal has enabled allows Asad to exchange experiences with him and colleagues. Communication, therefore, involves more than simply working to achieve organisational objectives. The communication between principals and their staff can also help younger teachers understand the role of the principal and leadership, becoming part of their leadership practices.

Amar stated that his interactions with other school principals and teachers had been very beneficial: *'It helped me learn how administrative work is run at school and what are the common problems and how to solve them. I also learned how a school principal should deal with different situations'*. The interactions Amar has with principals and peers contribute to leadership development and indicate that this is happening in School A, as he has been able to evaluate the leadership position of his school principal. Good communication has also been much appreciated by those in more senior positions. Saif is in a senior teacher role, and he explained what he believed was effective communication.

'From my own experience as a teacher working under an excellent school principal, it is the art of dealing with others and good human relations, within the limits of the Ministry system, I mean there must be consultation and discussion between teacher and principal, in which there is an effective and successful work cooperation, there shouldn't be authority centralised on the principal.' (Saif)

Saif believes that there should be more empowerment of both principals and teachers within their schools and it appears that this is what is happening in School A. The collaboration and discussions between teachers and school principals are all areas where they can learn from each other and understand more about what the school required: *'my relationships with other teachers, whether veteran teachers or new*

teachers, and school principals were very helpful in terms of a much-heightened awareness of the educational and administrative process' (Saif). Saif has experience of working with others and he has learnt from these experiences, so that he now feels he understands good leadership. He suggests that communication may lead to more effective processes when principals and teachers have more understanding of the roles of others. It also indicates that face-to-face communication is more important for building these relationships, and this is confirmed by the principal, Ali.

'The exchange of experiences is one of the most important things that can develop the school principal, training courses, and not online courses.' (Ali)

Ali asserted that online courses are not the most effective form of communication. Communicating in person can lead to more interactions than online courses and this is likely to be with informal communication. Observing others, and watching the application of processes and procedures, is clearly more beneficial, according to Ali, who declared that these should be *'practical visits whether inside Saudi Arabia or outside the Saudi Kingdom'*. To be able to network clearly facilitates such visits and indicates that Ali includes networking with others as an essential aspect of his leadership practice.

There is a positive acceptance of networking and good communication in School A and this can be seen in the responses from Ali, the principal, as well as from more junior teachers. Ali is shaping his relationships with both his colleagues and his peers, and it indicates that this is one of the ways in which he has honed his leadership practices.

Training

Training is believed to be important for individuals to be developed as leaders and this was mentioned by Ali, the principal, Bader, a senior teacher, and Amar and Rami, both junior teachers.

Ali explains about his own development as a school principal and his experience of being trained:

'I only joined this programme three years ago, the first two years we attended some training courses which in fact did not add anything new, the past year and a half we faced the Corona pandemic, the whole world was isolated from each

other. It has now been three years, and I have not found anything new. Did colleagues who were before me at the beginning of the programme get a result?
- I don't know' (Ali)

Where training was provided, it was often cursory: *'I took five training courses (online) ...but they were not long enough, lasting only one or two days'* (Bader). The training provided has not been sufficient to give Bader any confidence in developing him as a school leader. When teachers transition from a teaching role to a school principal role, they are unprepared for the demands of the role. Ali explains how teachers are expected to go from managing a class to managing an entire school without being trained for the position.

'I was a teacher with limited responsibilities; I was only responsible for my students, only me and my students, as a mini-environment, for example a teacher with thirty students. Only this is my responsibility, I didn't have except those thirty students, but as a school principal, my responsibilities and missions have expanded. Most of the school principals claimed that they endured what they could not bear, but work necessitates that they be responsible for the building or the educational system in the school, whether it is a teacher, a student, a guardian or the school building, all the administrative body in the school, All these are under the responsibility of the school principal, so his mission became more difficult, his work became more difficult than being just a teacher, his role became greater, and he must have exceptional qualities so he can deal with all categories of people and all levels. We have to handle all people with all their ways of thinking, it is so tiring for a person to burden all these, working as a school principal is so trying and needs so much effort.' (Ali).

Ali has explained what is needed for the transition from teacher to principal, yet, it appears that this is where little attention has been paid to meeting educators' needs. Nor does there seem to be any system in place at School A for preparing potential future leaders. Rami, a junior teacher, may have aspirations for the role but *'concerning training for school principals, I was not trained in it'* (Rami). Young teachers may have

potential for becoming school principals, but they are not receiving the support and training that will prepare them for the role.

Two of the three young teachers at this school considered that younger school principals would be better suited to training as they had a longer working life ahead of them. This meant, according to Rami, that there would be more benefits for everyone if younger teachers were given the opportunity to be school principals.

‘Integration of new and old principals and juniors should have the largest percentage because they will stay more time in the service. We should choose twenty percent of the old principals and eighty percent of the new ones, because the old principal will work for five to six years then will be retired, but for the new principal he will stay working for about 20 years ahead, and I will benefit from him, and the training programme should focus on this.’ (Rami).

Although Rami thought the younger principals would add more value if trained, as they had more years ahead of them, Amar thought older principals were too entrenched in their outdated ways. Amar is clear that older school principals are no longer able to cope with the demands of the role.

‘I mean the older the school principal, the more likely he is to be stuck in a rut. He just goes through the motions at work until it is time to go home, while a younger school principal is more likely to be dynamic and creative with lots of ideas he wants to put in practice. I mean younger school principals can develop education and manage schools more successfully.’ (Amar)

Previously, some participants suggested that school principals can exchange experiences, which can help them develop. However, Amar believes that more mature school principals no longer have any incentive to learn and develop, which is what is required for effective school management. Younger school principals may be more willing to be trained or develop training opportunities within the school environment.

The gap between being a class teacher and being a school principal is wide and, therefore, not easily bridged. Responsibilities increase and these may not always be recognised by younger members of staff. Principal Ali indicates that a principal must be

prepared to take on multiple roles and he also commented on how tiring it was. Although Amar envisages younger leaders to be more dynamic and creative, they may not yet have the skills and experience to navigate their way through the challenges that may confront them. This may require more preparation on their part, and training may not be sufficient to prepare them for the role. It should be noted that it is the two junior teachers who consider older principals to be less effective than younger ones; this may be because they do not yet have an overview of the position and have not recognised the value of experience. Alternatively, they may not agree with the decisions being made by their own school principal.

From the responses of these participants, leadership training does not appear to have been effectively introduced into the school. This is partly because funding has not been available, as Ali has suggested, but also may be due to any training provided not being relevant to their needs. The training available appears to have been unrelated to the perceived demands of the leadership role.

Tatweer Programme

Although it has been promoted as a means of leader development in Saudi Arabia, many of the participants were unaware of the Tatweer programme for developing schools, despite their school being on the programme for three years. This meant that they were unable to comment on the selection process and why some schools, or potential principals, were chosen, while others were not. Amar, Karam and Saif had not heard anything about Tatweer, even though Karam and Saif were senior teachers.

When asked if he knew anything about the Tatweer programme, Rami said he knew that *'the education department has allocated an amount of money for developing the school's infrastructure, materials and equipment.'* His opinion on the role of the Tatweer programme in developing school principals was that it was *'better to conduct training courses or raise problems that occur inside the school, and develop better solutions for them than the current solutions available to the principal, as this can help in developing the school principal'*. Rami is, therefore, supporting the concept of any training being relevant to a specific school and not necessarily through the Tatweer programme.

Asad stated he had not heard of the Tatweer programme, but then went on to say '*I think our school is developing within the Tatweer programme, which is just a cliché, not based on any reliable studies and I am not aware of official approaches*'. This indicates that Asad does not think very highly of the Tatweer programme, and probably has little knowledge of its purpose in the development of school leaders. It is also surprising that the programme is not more widely promoted within the school and may indicate that it is reserved for an elite few. This may account for why some of the participants have suggested that perhaps younger teachers should be selected as school principals.

Only Ali, the principal, and Bader, a senior teacher and deputy head, admit to involvement in the Tatweer programme. Ali has provided his views on the Tatweer leadership programme he undertook, both the relevance and the success of the initiative.

'Tatweer is a great project in developing schools and school principals, but recently there have been falling short of many supports like financial support. We used to have a special budget to help in conducting training programmes for the principal or for teachers as well; the principal brings trainers to his colleagues so that he seeks to develop things that they fail in fulfilling, but unfortunately, as I told you, recently there is no longer a financial allocation for this aspect. Many of the programmes approved by the Ministry start strong and then weaken until they fade and end'. (Ali)

Ali has confirmed other studies that have stated how training programmes may start well and when they no longer have the financial resources provided, they simply fade away. This has happened in School A and may account for why some of the participants had no knowledge of the Tatweer programme in this school.

Bader says: '*I'm in charge of the Tatweer school principal development in my school*' and gave some insights into the way in which some school principals were selected for the programme.

'The first criterion is the school's productivity and the activities pursued by the school. The second criterion is the school principal's activities, ideas and works.

The third criterion is the school principal's mindset, intellectual orientation as related to activities, programme preparation, school management, and how the school principal implements the work he is required to implement by the Department of Education.' (Bader)

This implies that the schools selected for the programme may already be the ones that are running successfully, and not necessarily the ones where the school principal would most benefit from training. This is reinforced by Asad's comments below.

'I think that leaders who have knowledge about new electronic developments by the Ministry and the second thing is the principal who has more than 15 years of experience. I also believe that individuals with arts specialisations are more suitable for leadership roles than those with science specialisations, primarily because they tend to be less aggressive. I think we have to focus on hiring people with literary specialisations, keeping in mind age, experience and evaluation factors.' (Asad)

Although Asad suggests that those with scientific knowledge, such as IT skills, may be among those selected for the programme, he indicates that the ones who would most benefit are those coming from an arts background. He argues that the wrong people are being selected for the programme, although this is clearly only his opinion and has not been raised by any of the other participants. However, an emphasis is being placed on the school principals as, once the selected schools are on the programme, the school principals can choose their courses by registering for them. This may not necessarily be courses that would benefit their leadership development. Although Ali confirms that Tatweer courses targeting leadership for school principals are where '*attendance is obligatory*', there is no indication that these particular courses are relevant to leadership development and practice. As noted earlier, Ali previously that he did not learn anything new in the courses.

Bader did not feel the Tatweer programme placed enough focus on what was really needed to develop school principals.

‘Development of buildings and school principals isn’t given the same level of attention. There are only one or two courses concerned with development as a concept rather than with the development of school principals. Such courses are lacking, to tell the truth. They are more interested in how the school looks in a physical sense and hence the emphasis is on murals and paintings. The main focus should be development of school principals and teachers but the main point in the development process on this programme is that all that is said and written should be 100% correct/valid.’ (Bader)

As Bader is on the programme, he is in a position to comment on the programme’s value to leadership development and he clearly believes this is not sufficient. Furthermore, he states that he and the school principal are doing ‘*everything that is humanly possible to implement the programmes*’ but they do not have enough time and have only been able to complete about 60-70% of what is required. He recognises that the courses are supposed to benefit teachers, principals and students but suggests that they should be delivered by non-teaching staff as teachers are already working to their limits.

Although the Tatweer programme was set up to develop school principals, participants did not feel that this met their needs. Bader states: ‘*There is more focus upon appearances and hard copy reports rather than on actual substance*’. The relevance of the training provided has not been sufficient to give Bader any confidence in developing him as a school leader as it has not had relevance to the realities of the role.

Rami also recognises that he can learn from the experiences of a school principal, which will benefit him as a teacher, especially if that leader is well-developed. However, when the school leaders are expected to deliver the training themselves, it may not be possible for them to implement the programme effectively, as their time is already very limited. Bader explained how the Tatweer programme should be delivered in schools.

‘There are training courses which are designed for teachers and others which are designed for teachers supervising Tatweer programs. They may administer one course per term to teachers, while administering one, two or three courses per term to the principal or vice principal. There are courses for teachers and courses

for students. Of course, it is up to us to choose the issues and the courses that we feel are of interest to us. They also educate the school principal as to the concept of development and what could be useful to the faculty as a whole in terms of leadership and education. The courses are first administered to the school principal then to the administrative staff, then to the teachers and lastly to the students. I believe that, if Tatweer programs were correctly implemented in all schools, they would certainly be quite useful for school principals, teachers and students.’ (Bader)

Bader believes that the concept of the Tatweer programme is good but, in practice, it is not working well in School A. He explained that the course he attended required him to develop the school mission, the school vision and provide possible solutions for any issues the school faced. He then had to ‘*hold related meetings and finally document the process*’. According to Bader, this did not relate to leadership development. Possibly the school already had a good mission statement and vision and perhaps he believed solutions to any issues were not a leader’s full responsibility. However, as he mentioned earlier, he did not feel written assessments helped in developing school principals.

When it comes to selecting school principals for development programmes, there seems to be confusion about how the process works. Ali told how he would simply receive a phone call from the Tatweer unit asking him to attend a programme.

‘Concerning programmes of the training centre, they send one link for the whole educational administration, which contains general links and private links, according to the colleague’s needs, in which all meetings and training courses are included. If you found yourself needing any course you can register and participate, if you already know the content of the course, then don’t subscribe to it. We attended courses in the training centre related to the practice of leadership. These are allocated for school principals of all educational stages, practising leadership for the first stage, practising leadership for the second stage; we can say it is a developmental meeting depending on educational stages, but as I told you, most of the programmes start with a serious powerful start. Then, in the end, you find that they become weak and disappear, or

become less interesting, or the Ministry is preoccupied with other programmes. It is as if there is no future plan to follow. Choosing development units for programmes is limited to principals of Tatweer schools, they don't choose from all schools, only Tatweer schools like ours. If there is a course for Tatweer schools principals, they choose all principals, and the attendance is obligatory.' (Ali)

The programme is limited to 18 Tatweer schools in the area but, as Ali has confirmed, there is no plan and school principals do not receive consistent development, nor does it appear that there is any evaluation of the programme to monitor its success. Ali considered Tatweer to be a great conceptual project in the beginning but then it ran out of funding: it is therefore important to ensure that there is sustainability. There must be long-term planning and, according to Ali, this has not happened with the Tatweer programme. With development teams not understanding the pressures under which school leaders are working, it has been difficult for principals to have confidence in the programme.

In addition, Bader indicates that those nominated for development on the Tatweer programmes may not be there because they are more deserving.

'Sometimes nominations are made by nepotism - they choose someone who is not qualified nor experienced at all with dealing with a school principal's tasks or with ministerial programmes. They have to choose according to the qualifications of the school principal.' (Bader).

Without understanding the selection process for developing school principals, Bader perceives this as being driven by nepotism. However, as Bader indicates, those promoted to positions through nepotism may not be qualified for the role. This has an impact on the way school leaders develop their skills to ensure they can carry out their role effectively and may have implications for the future.

Socialisation

Networking and socialisation are intrinsically connected in this context, as networking facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences that are foundational to anticipatory,

professional, and organisational socialisation processes, enabling participants to navigate and adapt to leadership roles effectively (Crow, 2006; Crow et al., 2017). Through peer interactions and collaborative environments, networking enhances the informal mechanisms of socialisation, thereby supporting leadership development and capacity building within educational settings.

Socialisation is defined as a continuous, multi-stage process of learning a new role, which can occur in both pre-service and in-service stages and encompasses personal, professional and organisational identity-building (Crow, 2007). Socialisation is different from networking, which is a human capital competency that supports the development of personal relationships between the participants in training programmes (Burbaugh, & Kaufman 2017). As noted earlier, the participants perceive that good relationships are enhanced by networking with others and can ultimately have a positive impact on leadership development. The process of developing school principals highlights the ways in which socialisation is enhanced by allowing potential school leaders to acquire the skills they need for the role. This includes understanding a school's culture.

It takes time to become familiar with the school culture and the local community. Bader explained how he began to feel more comfortable in the school environment.

‘When I first arrived to work at this school, I didn’t know anything about it, because it is a large school with many communities and ideologies, as well as a large student body. I have been working at this school for more than eight years now and have got to know it better over time through actual practice.’ (Bader)

This indicates that capacity building and socialisation may come from within the school itself and that younger teachers can benefit from being immersed in the school culture, whilst gaining leadership skills which may help them to understand how to improve quality processes within the school. As Bader asserts, *put what you learned into practice*. Knowing the school culture relates to the notion of organisational socialisation.

The local community culture also has an influence on the school itself, as Ali explained.

‘I worked at a school that feeds my current school, so I am close to my school environment, I am the first to know their news, the community is not strange to

me, I mean, we are in the same area where we know the society and people from every class, their morals and ways of their dealing. Therefore, I had knowledge about the school before working in it, because I previously worked in a school in the same geographical and population area.' (Ali).

There is a wider influence than just the school itself as it encompasses the whole community and may be why many teachers choose to work in areas already known to them, as Ali has done. The school principal has to fit in with the needs and aspirations of the local community, if he wishes to be an effective leader. Familiarity with the local culture means that teachers and principals feel more comfortable with expectations, as Amar does.

'I'm already familiar with this school, because I used to be a student here. In fact, there are four or five members of the teaching staff who used to be my teachers. So, I know all about this school, having been a student and then a teacher in it. I know its rules, its students and even the neighbourhoods around it.' (Amar).

Although Amar deems this to be a positive sign of adapting to the school and community culture, this may not always be the best way forward for teachers as they are more likely to fall into the position of accepting the status quo. If this way of doing things is familiar to the teacher, then he may not consider ways of improving. Rami knew little about the culture of the area where he took up a position, but he read about it and had some understanding of expectations.

'It is learning about the customs of the community, of course I read about the neighbourhood which I am going to work in, I studied about their nature, their accustomed culture, their way of dealing, of course I am working in a school which has students from many nationalities, and there is a diversity of creeds, so I tried to make a smooth and cautious entry. You know being a new teacher, so surely at first I was afraid, but of course this is wrong. I was afraid from going beyond my limits or something like that. As a teacher, you have tasks to finish, and information that you have to deliver to students smoothly. You must start with a careful start. Speaking frankly, I was so careful at the beginning.' (Rami)

There is no indication that Rami made changes in his teaching role, as he was careful in his approach at the beginning. However, it is likely that he would be more open to improvements, despite being initially wary of going against the school culture, as he admits this may not always be the best approach. Trying to make changes that may improve a school is one of the aims of leadership, but principals need to be aware of how to work with others to achieve these changes and deal with resistance. Building professional relationships through successful socialisation can develop skills that enhance leadership.

It takes time for principals to settle into their role and they need to be aware of the culture, both of the school and of the community. There was, therefore, some disquiet about the policy to transfer school principals to new schools without advance notification, as Ali comments.

‘I would like that they take the school principal into consideration before transfer, they have to inform him that he will be transferred to another school, and ask him is he ready or not, and whether he is aware of the school environment. If the colleague transferred to work in a school in which he is not familiar with, it is going to be a shock for him, and this creates a problem and a huge obstacle for the school principal’s development or creativity in the environment of the school that he transferred to.’ (Ali)

Ali, with his experience as a school principal, is well-aware of the challenges associated with being transferred to a new school environment. It takes time to build relationships and become familiar with the new culture and this may have an impact on his development as well as the new school’s development. This view was not fully supported by participants. Rami acknowledged the value *of transferring principals between schools*, yet he cautioned that this should be carried out only when the schools are in similar environments. There is, therefore, agreement on the importance of local culture in developing leaders and this should be taken into account if principals are to be transferred to different schools.

In terms of socialisation as a practice in School A, Ali explains how he operates within his domain as a principal.

'I treat my colleagues as if I am a part of them, and we work with each other as one team spirit. My way of dealing with them creates an atmosphere of friendliness, creates an atmosphere of creativity, all the tasks I entrust them with, they perform to the fullest, I trust them, and I instil confidence in them. Good dealing with colleagues and instilling confidence in them, creates an ideal and productive atmosphere. So I earned their trust, and this helps us to achieve goals. Just by dealing well with colleagues, as we say, we judge a person by his behaviour and their way of dealing with others. When you treat people well, be 100% confident that you will reap what you sow and you will find what you are looking for and what you aspire to.' (Ali)

Ali clearly believes in the developing of relationships with his teachers as he sees this as a way of bringing out the best in them. He claims that he has earned their trust and that they will follow his guidance. He believes that this is how leadership practices are developed in his school.

School communities work together and provide a learning environment for potential leaders as they enhance their understanding of the roles of others. Socialisation into a new school can, therefore, be challenging and can have an impact on a school principal's leadership practice, as it takes time to learn how to adapt. The building of trust in relationships with staff is what the principal suggests works for School A and is a large part of its leadership development.

Barriers to Leadership Development

The earlier discussion highlights some barriers to leadership development in School A. However, participants also shared their views on whether more could be done within the school to better prepare future school principals.

School principals may not have the skills to deal with administration: Ali commented that *'school principals may pass the interview or written test, but they don't have any previous administrative experience, and that is another obstacle'*. The role has also changed over the past few years, with more responsibilities. This has become a barrier for some, who prefer not to take on the role. One teacher, Amar, stated *'I have no*

desire to be a school principal because the fatigue is more and the responsibilities are greater and there are no advantages or incentives'. This disinclination to be put forward for the role of a school leader may mean that it will be difficult to find the right kind of people to take on the role in future. The suggestions put forward to try and deal with this issue included Karam's proposal to give more power and benefits to the principal in recognition of their hard work.

'To give him more powers, only more powers, they give him more advantages; Benefits in salary, benefits in working hours, financial incentives. Because the principal is under very big burdens and needs more support.' (Karam).

There is recognition that the role of school principal is onerous, as Karam points out. Work pressures are perceived to be immense for school principals and senior teachers. With such heavy workloads, finding extra time for training may be a challenge that even younger principals find beyond their scope. It may be that such training needs to be at the preparation stage, before taking on the role of principal.

It should be acknowledged that Ali's responses are from his own experience as he explains how the onerous duties of a school principal often impede any development in his leadership practices.

'Numerous tasks are assigned to school principal, lately everything should be made by the school principal, reports and statistics, many things burden the school principal which I think are useless and do not serve the educational field, therefore, the heavy burdens on the school principal keeps him away from his basic work and his hard work, and this is another obstacle that makes him not capable of doing his job to the fullest' (Ali).

This implies that Ali believes he could do so much more to develop leadership practices, if he did not need to spend so much time on other tasks. Ali, the principal, was asked about the skills and abilities he believed were required of school principals to be effective. He listed personal qualities as well as technical skills, indicating perhaps that he possessed such skills and qualities as he was aware of the importance of these in leadership practice.

'First of all is to possess technology skills, and what comes in the second place, that he should be aware of all Ministerial development programmes, in order to deliver to all educational staff working under his management. He should have wide knowledge, be responsible, deal wisely with his colleagues, have the ability to deliver information, have the ability to persuade and should be loved by students and teachers so that they can accept taking on new responsibilities.'

(Ali)

Technology skills were also mentioned by others, suggesting their importance in the modern world. However, Amar was also aware of how some people could take over management systems and use technology to their own advantage: '*a senior school principal insisted on being the only one to work with the system, he wouldn't let anyone else work with him nor would he delegate any of his powers*'. Younger teachers, such as Amar, have already been influenced by poor leadership practices of other school principals, but it indicates that having good technology skills may be used as a barrier to the participation of younger members of staff.

Bader, as deputy head, considers that school principals cannot be developed effectively unless '*they take key courses offered annually by the Ministry of Education*'. It must be taken into account that Bader runs the Tatweer programme in the school and his views may be biased, but it seems to imply that there may have been a reluctance within the school to take up some of the programmes on offer. However, it was noted that Bader was a critic of these courses and believed they were lacking in content.

The main barriers to leadership development seem to be related to the amount of duties school principals are expected to undertake. This does not give much flexibility for introducing any changes or finding ways to improve as the school principal's schedule is perceived to be very busy.

Overview

This chapter presents and analyses participants' views on leadership development in School A in Najran, Saudi Arabia. There has been little training for school leaders before taking up their positions and requisite skills have been lacking. Participants had

clear ideas about the many skills school principals need and believed these skills could be enhanced through collaboration as well as developmental training. However, some participants thought that training should be focused on younger school leaders as the more experienced ones were too entrenched in their ideas and would not be able to change their practice. There is no evidence of this in School A and other participants did not share this view.

Developing school leaders is important but some potential contenders may have no desire for the position due to the perceived onerous duties. There is no preparation for the role and participants feel that the Tatweer programme for developing leaders is ineffective and not meeting the needs of school principals. The culture of the school depends on the school principal's leadership; and some teachers have returned to the school, so are familiar with the culture. However, in some cases, school principals are transferred to new schools without any advance notice and these schools may have a completely unfamiliar organisational culture. This makes it more challenging for leadership practices to adapt and develop.

The next chapter presents the findings from school B.

Chapter Five: Findings Case Study B

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews carried out with seven participants in school B, to explore their perspectives on the nature and outcomes of the school leadership development process. School B is located in a suburban area of Najran. It was established in 2000 and has 22 teachers and 380 students. Unlike school A, school B is not included in the Tatweer programme, and this has a tangible impact on the leadership development process at this school.

Table 5.1 provides biographical data about the seven participants, using pseudonyms. As the table indicates, the sample comprises individuals with a variety of life experiences and job roles. Sampling follows the model established with school A, with the head and senior and junior staff from Arabic, English and Maths departments.

Table 5.1: School B participants

Code		Name	Position	Experience	School
P 8/2	B1	Naif	Principal	6 years as head	2
P 9/2	B2	Jamil	Junior Maths teacher	4 years	2
P10/2	B3	Sami	Senior English teacher	10 years	2
P11/2	B4	Jaber	Senior Maths teacher	10 years	2
P12/2	B5	Mariy	Junior Arabic teacher	4 years	2
P13/2	B6	Tami	Junior English teacher	3 years	2
P14/2	B7	Rmhi	Senior Arabic teacher	12 years	2

The interviews with those participants were held in Arabic (even though some of the participants had advanced knowledge in English) to ensure consistency of the responses and to prevent potential misunderstanding. Following the procedures outlined in chapter three, the interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically.

This allowed the researcher to identify the main themes and patterns in participants' responses.

Six themes emerged from the interviews. These are:

- The meaning of school leadership
- The development and self-development of school leaders
- The Tatweer programme
- Barriers to Leadership Development,
- Training and Leadership development
- Networking and socialisation.

Meaning of School Leadership

The interviews revealed that there is no uniform definition of leadership among the seven participants. For participant B1, who has been working as a principal for more than six years school leadership was equivalent to management as “a successful leader was one capable of achieving the objectives the school and the Ministry of Education have set”. The focus on outputs and outcomes was also present for participant B3 who defined leadership development as “programmes that help the leaders to become successful managers and to produce effective results”. The focus on the managerial aspect of leadership was partly informed by the bureaucratic and administrative requirements set for those who occupy leadership roles, as participant B6 acknowledged: “School leaders shall represent the school locally and internationally, they should ensure that educational standards have been met and that the programmes developed have pedagogical soundness”. The need for involvement in the day-to-day administration of the school was mentioned by the school principal who lamented that completing reports, timetables, and assessing the work of his colleagues, constitute a substantial part of his time, so anyone who wants to become a school leader “needs to know how to deal with the paper work “effectively and efficiently as the reporting requirements are being constantly updated” and modified so that a degree of flexibility in adapting to those requirements is also needed for those assuming leadership roles.

However, leadership behaviours in school B are perceived to require moving beyond a managerial role. For participants B2 and B6, school leadership also requires the capacity to introduce and manage change within the organisation. Participant B2 recognised that educational institutions are in a stage of “continued development and modernisation of the work environment” that has put a significant strain on all employees, and school leaders should be able to know how to help schools to adapt, modernise and grow while further improving upon operational aspects and efficiency. Even though participant B2 spoke extensively about the modernisation challenges Saudi Arabian schools face, and the need for school leaders to think of new mechanisms for improving the work environment, he also recognised that personnel motivation and retention is one of the key factors for any change effort to succeed. For that reason, a school leader was defined by participant B2 as an individual who works to “increase the motivation of the personnel to achieve the objectives of the organisation.” The focus on the role of the leader as someone who initiates and manages change was also mentioned by B6, who emphasised that creativity and innovation are essential leadership skills and that the school leadership development programmes should emphasise promoting the role of the leader as someone responsible for introducing “new methodologies for learning and new pedagogical approaches” and thus “modernise the way we currently teach and work”. The need for innovation, for this participant, was closely related to information needs in the digital society as shown below:

“We need leaders who can help bring reform to the educational system. Those people need to recognise that we live in the digital and information society. Today, schools need to find a way on how use the information technologies to improve the learning process. And school leaders should be the people who can help to introduce digitalisation and innovation in schools” (participant B6).

The third dimension of leadership that emerged from the interviews relates to supporting excellence and discipline within the organisation which is closely related to the specific societal role that schools have. Participant B4 stated that “our purpose” is “to achieve the highest levels of discipline and excellence at work” whereas the leaders have to

help in “team building and in raising the team spirit” for the above objectives to be achieved. He added that “schools have to become well-structured and disciplined organisations and each member of the team must know what their role in the school is”. While several other participants, notably participant B1, recognised that new leadership behaviours in school B are needed to ensure that the organisation is capable of retaining its position as a leading school in the region, excellence can be accomplished through different means. In the view of participant B6, contemporary schools need not embrace creativity as leadership development was understood as “the adoption of a creative approach to leading people and the use of the most advanced methods in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation”. What the participant meant was that leadership development was perceived as a way through which creativity and innovation can be promoted within schools. According to participant B6, many schools today are ‘stuck in the past’, lacking the vision on how to keep them as places where knowledge and education are diffused and propagated, especially as many teachers struggle to adapt to the “technology demands of the digital era”. This highlights the emerging demands for school leadership in Saudi Arabia, as it is not enough to demonstrate managerial capabilities, but successful leaders require a vision that outlines the changing role of the schools in contemporary society and have a plan, not only about how this vision should be accomplished, but also to ensure the support of their subordinates for realising their visions while also maintaining the quality of education and the excellence that any school needs to provide.

After asking the participants about the meaning of leadership, the researcher also asked them how the leadership competences they identified are developed in school B. Participant B1 observed that a lot has been done in the past few years to ensure that school leaders are aware of the expectations set for the job and the objectives that the Ministry wants to achieve. “There are annual teachers’ conferences . . . that the Ministry holds to familiarise us with its plans and objectives. This conference also helps us discuss freely the Ministry plans for teachers’ development”. When the participant was prompted to reflect on how this conference has impacted upon teachers’ development in school B, he noted that “the conference is helpful to identify the gaps in practice, so that we know in which areas we can improve upon for the next year”. The conference

has been used to develop an action plan about teacher development in school B, with participant B1 conducting sessions with the teachers to explain the standards and practices that teachers are expected to follow. When the researcher prompted the other participants about whether the action plan for teacher development that the principal (B1) has promoted has been useful for their leadership development, participant B3 stated that

“Most of his recommendations were about how we can, as teachers, promote students’ engagement in the classroom and how we can help the students who fall behind in studies catch up with the rest of the group. I think this is really important because a good teacher shall be the one who can help inspire the students to show their best.”

As mentioned above, for participant B2 and B6, school leadership also involved capacity to introduce and manage changes within the organisation. Prompted about how change management skills are developed in school B, participant B2 observed that “teachers are encouraged to share what has worked well in the classroom and help their colleagues with the problems they have experienced”. The purpose of those interactions was to provide struggling teachers with feedback on how their behaviour can change to improve the classroom atmosphere and students’ achievements. Participant B3 was among the most active individuals to provide guidance and advice to the colleagues, and he said that the experience has provided him with novel views on how he can best share his experience to promote meaningful change, not only in his own classroom, but also within the entire school. Participant B6, however, lamented that the formal training of change management skills in school B was deficient, as there were no formal training opportunities on change leadership. However, he praised the efforts of the school principal, participant B1, who “has done a lot to change the administrative side of school B” and has shown his subordinates how leadership can bring progress and change even in a bureaucratic organisation such as school B. It can be concluded that leadership development in school B is done mostly informally, through exchange of best practices and personal experience as the school leader is

disseminating best examples that his subordinates are expected to follow and those issues will be discussed further in the text below.

Development and Self-development of Leadership

The second theme focuses on development and self-development. The likelihood of holding a leadership position in the future encourages participants to invest in self-development and to seek opportunities to develop their leadership capabilities, and learn as much as possible, so that they can excel in both their current and future job roles. That presumption appears to hold true for school B. While only participant B1 classified himself as a school leader, due to his position as a school principal, all other participants have undertaken both development and self-development initiatives that helped them to develop their leadership skills and capacities. Those included participating in leadership-related conferences (participant B5), participating in workshops and in exchange programmes about how to communicate, and how interaction in the classroom could be improved (participant B5), and even formal training on how administrative and managerial tasks should be performed (participant B1). While those initiatives were not entirely oriented towards leadership development, it helped the participants to acquire some of the skills required for their future leadership roles.

“I am happy with all the leadership development courses that I had taken because they helped me to get a new perspective on what behaviours are needed in the classrooms. Teachers should be open-minded and should encourage the students to express themselves” (participant B5)

The participants seemed to believe that leadership is not an innate quality, that some people naturally possess, but rather that leadership behaviours can be learned, developed and nurtured. This was best noted in the answer of participant B3 who said that leadership capabilities can be strengthened by:

“attending courses and learning from the other colleagues' experiences. You need to search and learn from the successful experiences according to your

status. You need to develop the tools and the capabilities that may all contribute for you to obtain the results that you want to achieve”.

Leadership self-development, according to participant B3, should not be limited to lessons learned from collaborating and networking with peers and other professionals. Instead, school leaders should aim to develop expertise in the selected field of specialisation because “only the good and knowledgeable teacher can become a good and an effective school leader” (participant B3). When participant B3 was prompted on how he has developed his knowledge as a teacher, he mentioned that a key priority was to keep up with local and international developments, “read academic journals and do everything necessary to know about new teaching practices”. Similarly, participant B5 said he is attending ELS (English as second language) seminars every 6 months to familiarise himself with how he can become a better leader in the classroom. However, there were insufficient opportunities for professional development and specialisation and a shortage of “conferences, seminars, workshops and other practical training in the specialised centres” (participant B4). Leadership development through training will be discussed in theme 3 where participants’ views on the shortcomings and advantages of the existent leadership development programmes will be presented.

The idea that leadership capabilities should be self-developed, rather than developed through formal methods of education, is the view of the senior school teachers (participants B3, B4, B7). Those participants emphasised that the primary driver for school leadership development is “the willingness to learn and develop oneself” (participant B7) and “the desire to change your behaviours into something more productive” (participant B3). For participant B4, the main barrier to leadership development was the growing propensity “of teachers to stick to the things they know, and they have been doing for years”. Participant B3 also lamented that many of his peers in school B “do the same things over and over again, expecting different results, simply because they have used to doing so”. As the bureaucratic nature of school work encourages teachers to follow the same curriculum and the same teaching practices year after year, unlearning poor behaviours becomes a challenge. Participant B1 has said that his main priority as a school leader was to change the bureaucratic culture of

the school, adding that he is trying to incentivise “creativity and independent thinking”, while admitting that this process takes time and that “he is out of ideas on how he can encourage it”. The teaching routine, according to the senior teachers in school B and the school principal, has become a strong barrier that prevents the self-development of leaders because it encourages sticking to the status quo instead of encouraging innovation and creativity. Even though capability to manage changes (including change of the organisational culture) was identified by study participants as an important skill that school leaders should possess, it seems that teachers in school B have not been able to develop their change management capabilities to the point that they can produce a meaningful change of the organisational culture.

However, while the participants were aware that self-development is the key to promotion, growth and leadership development, not all of them have been actively seeking ways to strengthen their leadership capabilities, that they mostly attribute to lack of guidance and support networks. Since the school was not participating in the Tatweer programme, opportunities for developing leadership capabilities were reduced (see theme 3). Indeed, most participants were aware that they did not have access to the resources that the Tatweer programme provides for personal development. What also inhibited the effective development and self-development of the participants was the lack of recognition for the efforts spent in continuous improvement and self-improvement. While this perspective was not shared by all participants, it was notable in the answers of some of the junior teachers who lamented the growing nepotism and favouritism in the schools, as well as the inability to ensure that those promoted to leadership positions have the competences to succeed in the job. Participant B2 said that “senior teaching positions are being given to people who do not achieve the same results as some junior members. All they need is to be friends with someone who can push you for promotion”. For participant B6, what is turning many people away from the teaching profession in general is “seeing that their efforts are not rewarded and recognised”, especially in the cases where the teacher exceeds the expectations placed upon him, and his students meet and exceed the benchmark criteria.

Participant B2 also observed that the “schools do not have established procedures on how promotions shall be given, and it is very easy to be ignored year after year”. Such responses led to participants being unwilling to put further effort into self-development and building leadership capacity. The perceived diminishing prospects of promotion to leadership roles discouraged participant B2:

“I want to learn more on how to be a better teacher and leader, but I don’t want to study and work on my own and in my free time without any recognition. If I get another position in the future, where I need other skills, then I will think about how I can develop those skills”.

The paradox in this participant’s response is evident. The meritocratic approach to promotion requires the advancement of those who have the required skills and capabilities to perform the job role, but the participants seem unwilling to engage in further anticipatory socialisation as they do not see any personal benefit. Missing out on developing and promoting leadership skills and capabilities, however, would have an adverse impact on their promotion opportunities even if they end up working in an organisation with a more meritocratic culture than this school, as their unwillingness to change and develop themselves might be interpreted as a character flaw that might affect their career growth. As participant B1 noted, “schools in the area experience problems in filling the job openings for principals because they cannot find candidates with sufficient qualifications and experience” which suggests that many teachers do not pursue leadership opportunities.

Junior teachers were not the only ones who observed the lack of incentives for those willing to spend time and effort to develop themselves as leaders. Participant B4 claims that “there is a lack of a clear plan for [leadership] development from the Ministry”. They are organising different programmes and initiatives to support this, but I don’t think they have a plan how all this fits together”. The lack of vision on how leadership development is promoted by the Ministry was also noted by participant B1, who admitted that he had not received institutional support before he had become a school leader, but only took “some courses after his promotion”. When he was prompted about how useful those courses were, he was hesitant in delivering a final verdict but only mentioned that “I

have learned more from doing things and working on the job than I had learned from those courses”, which might be taken as evidence for the disconnect between the personal and professional development programmes offered by the Ministry and the participants’ perceived needs for leadership positions in Saudi Arabia. While the development of the Tatweer programme could be used as evidence that the Saudi Ministry of education is looking to develop leadership potential in schools, it is perceived that many of those efforts are patchy, incomplete, and available only for certain schools. Senior teachers (participants B3, B4 and B7) were not properly informed about the ministerial efforts in supporting leadership development, highlighting the need for developing a cohesive and all-encompassing programme.

Training and Leadership Development

With school B not participating in the Tatweer program, the number of opportunities for structured training in leadership were limited. Apart from participants B1 and B7, none of the other participants had participated in a training programme designed specifically to build their leadership skills. For participant B2 and participant B5, this was not a problem, because both shared the belief that leadership development should be accomplished through personal development rather than through “taking courses that only waste your time. If you don’t want to be a leader and if you do not want to excel in your job, no amount of training is going to help you become one” (participant B5). Participant B2 also argued that leadership training might not be effective “because many of the people who go to seminars and training want just to get a certificate and forget to apply what they were supposed to learn the moment that seminar ends”

Participants were also concerned about the content of the training courses offered by the Ministry of Education. None of the participants took part in those courses because they were not convinced that they would help them in their work.

“The Ministry of Education offered leadership courses last year, and I saw the programme. It was theoretical. They wanted us to learn about the different types of leadership and about the different capabilities that a leader has. But none of this is useful. I could read all about leadership in a book. I did not have to go to such training” (participant 13).

Participant B4 was also sceptical about the content of the Ministry leadership programmes, noting that “the problem is that the programme is nothing else but a series of lectures about the importance of leadership. You sit all day in a classroom where they just talk to you. You are not taught anything practical”. Three of the seven interviewees believe that leadership development courses have been introduced with good intentions, but there was a perceived mismatch between what teachers need to be successful leaders and what they were actually learning.

The only participant with a positive opinion about the content and relevance of the current leadership development programme was participant B7, who said that such programmes are designed to “help teachers open their eyes about what leadership”. He believed that the reason why so many teachers were reluctant to participate in leadership development courses was because the Ministry “failed to promote those courses to the teachers and show them directly how those courses can be beneficial to them”. The interviews collectively suggest that the problems with the leadership development programmes in Saudi Arabia are two-fold: first, leadership development programmes should be adapted to the specific need and realities of schools in Saudi Arabia, and second, those programmes should be promoted in such a way that the teachers could see the practical benefits of participating in those programmes.

The lack of appropriate marketing for leadership development programmes was also observed in the discussion of the Tatweer program. Most participants did not associate the Tatweer programme with leadership development and were not familiar with the opportunities that the programme provides for personal enrichment and capability building. “For many teachers, Tatweer means burying oneself with a large volume of paper work and they do not want to deal with more paperwork” (participant B5). This perception was also shared by the participants who were not familiar with the training opportunities that the Tatweer programme offers. “To be honest, there are plenty of courses and seminars to help teachers learn the skills they need at their job, I do not think one or two more programmes are going to change much about the way teachers are being trained in the country” (participant B6). There is also a perceived saturation of the market of training programmes in Saudi Arabia which, combined with the increased

paperwork and administrative requirements, informs the participants' reluctance to participate in them.

When the participants were prompted on how structured school leadership programmes should be developed, they could not provide an answer. Two participants said that they were not in a position to offer recommendations. Participant B1 mentioned that leadership development programmes should be more focused on those who are going to be promoted to high level positions in the school administration and be a testing and training ground if those people are able to cope with the demands of the job.

“The Ministry of Education needs to know who are the best and the brightest. Leadership training programmes shall be directed to those people. We need to see if they are the right fit for the job and, if they cannot do the job, the Ministry needs to look for more prepared people”

Participants B5 and B7 emphasised that a leadership development programme should be more practically oriented to become relevant to the teachers' actual needs as “it needs to be focused directly on the matters than the teachers are really dealing with every single day” (participant B5). Participant B7 stressed that leadership development programmes should promote “exchange of best practices among the teachers” so that “we can learn from what worked and what did not work”. The idea that leadership should be developed through institutionalised training is discussed in the section (below) focused on the Tatweer programme.

The Tatweer Programme

School B has remained outside the Tatweer programme and that has affected participants' opportunities for leadership development. Two participants (B2 and B7) had not heard about the programme before and had no idea what it entails and how participation in the programme could support their personal and professional development. Most of the other participants stated that they had heard about the programme, but remained unsure about its scope, outreach and sponsored activities. For example, participant B3 admitted that he has heard about the programme in the news but only associated it with “introducing new technologies in the classroom to

support the learning process”. He added that the programme is helping the schools “to procure the technologies that they will need to modernise the classrooms” and introduce technology-driven curriculum “relevant to contemporary business needs”. Participant B5 was also familiar with programme but he associated it with “improving educational quality and helping the students attain the required level of literacy”. The participant believed that the key objective of the programme was to improve the students’ learning outcomes by introducing innovative teaching techniques. Participant B1, the school principal, was asked if the school has applied to participate in the Tatweer programme and he said that they had tried, but had not been selected. This rejection could have been the reason why participant B1 seemed to believe that

“Tatweer is good and it can help a lot for the schools that managed to get selected. But it also asks too much from the teachers. It tries to aggressively change their teaching methods and I don’t think many of the schools can cope well”.

When asked whether the Tatweer programme can help in leadership development, participant B1 said that “I think it has helped many teachers in the country to learn new methods of teaching and to develop themselves professionally”. However, for participants 12 and B3, the scope of the Tatweer programme was limited towards supporting the “introduction of new teaching and learning methodologies” which, although beneficial for improving the quality of education in the participating institutions, did not focus that much on promoting leadership competences. “My friends [who participated in the program] told me that the programme tried to introduce the Western teaching practices in the Saudi context to improve the students’ performance and to structure better the curricula in the schools. I don’t remember if he mentioned that the programme helped him to become a better leader”. Participant B5 also shared anecdotal evidence about his friend who “thinks that the programme creates a big administrative mess and an enormous amount of paperwork”, which diverts the attention of the teachers from their more important teaching responsibilities. This indicates that Saudi Arabia needs to find a way to promote the scope and content of the Tatweer programmes that all stakeholders are fully familiarised with what the

programme involves and what it does to improve, not solely the learning process, but also the capabilities of school leaders. Nearly a decade since its introduction, the teachers outside the schools in which the programme has been introduced seem to have inaccurate perceptions on the objectives and the role of the programme

However, the participants may have considered participating in the Tatweer programme if they have been provided with an opportunity to do so. Participant B3 stated that “the programme works very well in so many schools so, if they decide to introduce it here, I will be very happy”. The school principal, participant B1, also said that the past rejections are not a reason for him to give up and he plans to apply for inclusion in the programme “in the near future”. Even the participants who were not familiar with the programme said that they are willing to “try new things” (participant B2) and “be innovative if this is going to improve the student’s life” (participant B7). Similarly, when asked if they are going to participate in leadership development programmes, under the Tatweer programme, almost all participants except B4) said that they are willing to try it. Participant B4 was also keen to participate in “any programmes that support leadership development”.

“Such programmes [referring to the Tatweer program] should not disrupt the teaching process and should not impose too high administrative tasks for teachers because, if this is the case, they will be more burden than help”.

This indicates that programmes for leadership development, especially the ones that put excessive workload and demands on teachers that are not directly related to supporting them in becoming better teachers are not going to be evaluated positively by the teachers, due to the perceived mismatch between the needs of the teachers and the programme contents.

Despite the willingness to participate in the programme, participants expressed their reservations about how the Tatweer functions. For example, participant B1 was concerned that it creates a two-tier system between the schools that participate and schools that do not” and the latter “are left behind from the educational reforms that the Saudi government has introduced” and “might struggle to attract students”. Similar concerns were expressed by participant B6, who said that the criteria for participation in

the Tatweer were not clearly identified and as a result “they do not tell us why one school gets in the programme while another one does not get in it”. When prompted if the exclusion from the Tatweer programme means that they have fewer opportunities for leadership development, participants B1 and B6 both said that it is highly likely that they might face such a problem but “many seminars for teacher development are open to anyone so you can join them if you want” (Participant B6).. Still, there was a feeling of ‘missing out’ among the participants’ when they spoke about the Tatweer programme.

Participants expressed concerns about the selection of participants in the Tatweer programme as many feared that the lack of clarity surrounding the eligibility criteria is giving rise to nepotism and favouritism. For participant B1, “the Ministry of Education wants to promote specific schools and the Tatweer programme helps them to single out some schools over the others.” Participant B3 said he does not know why his school was excluded from the programme and he thinks that the programme is increasing the divide between schools in the capital and those in the provinces:

“because many of the schools that were selected in the programme were from Riyadh. The administration of the programme is also based in Riyadh. They [the administration of the participating schools and the administration of the Tatweer programme] have connections with each other that are sometimes difficult to ignore”.

When prompted if he thinks that he has fewer opportunities for leadership development than his colleagues in the capital, the participant said that this is indeed the case, at least before the current Covid-19 pandemic “because many of the conferences and workshops were held in Riyadh” and he could not “miss school days to attend it”.

Tatweer can provide a number of opportunities for development and self-development of the schools in the area. However, there is a need for greater inclusion in the programme and clarification in relation to the eligibility criteria a school needs to meet to ensure that all schools can benefit from it. A failure to make the programme more inclusive and to clearly define the eligibility criteria could heighten frustration and resentment among schools not selected to participate.

Networking, Socialisation and Leadership Development

As noted above, the participants have experienced various aspects of anticipatory and personal socialisation. Another stage of the socialisation process is organisational socialisation, the process of personal and professional development undertaken to ensure that the individual has the skills required for them to fit within their specific role in the organisation. The interview data reveal that participants have struggled to embrace the role of teacher and the increased demands for leadership:

"it took me a lot of time to become comfortable with the environment in school B. There are so many things that the teachers must do, and the expectations that the administration, students, and parents have for us are so high" (participant B6).

Participant B6 adds that meeting expectations has been an important driver for his own personal development. Participant B2 also mentioned that the school has set very high performance criteria that must be met by both senior and junior teachers to "create a culture of excellence" and that everyone eventually becomes immersed in it. This indicates that the school environment itself facilitates the organisational socialisation of the teachers and drives their personal development. Participants claim that the younger teachers become immersed in a culture of excellence that the school promotes and eventually begin building the leadership capabilities that they need to excel in their job. Most participants believe that self-development is the path towards building leadership competences, as a direct consequence of being immersed in a culture "that encourages you to show your best at any time and at any given moment" (participant B6).

Networking and socialisation with peers play a role in the process of personal growth and maturity because the interactions between teachers help them in becoming familiar with the expectations of their profession and in developing as better leaders. Participant B6, who has worked for only three years in school B, mentioned that "I will be always thankful to Naif [the school principal] for showing me how to become a better teacher and encouraging me to try new things in the classroom". Participant B5 also stated that best practices for teaching, and for managing administrative tasks, are shared through

interpersonal communication between the teachers from different schools, so “we can learn from the peers.... and they are keen to share with us what they have learned” When the participants were asked if the teachers have sufficient opportunities for exchanging best practices, considering the limited opportunities for personal development, participant B5 argued that “the school encourages teachers to meet informally and share their own experiences so that they can learn from one another”. However, it remained unclear whether informal meetings between the teachers were the best way through which practices can be disseminated, as this may lack external validation and sufficient outreach. There was concern, especially among the junior teachers, that their input during the informal meetings is not taken into account, as noted by participant B4 who said “the management must listen to junior teachers more. We might not have the same experience as senior teachers, but we know how teaching shall happen in the classroom and have something to share”. Another issue with the informal channels for professional socialisation is that best practices can only be shared if teachers themselves want to learn how to address the challenges that they face in the classroom and seek advice from their peers. As participant B6 noted, “you can only get help if you actively seek for it and many of my colleagues are not actively seeking help”. However, it was perceived that informal peer-support is essential for furthering the socialisation process of the participants for the twin roles of teacher and school leader because it enables them to find a solution to the problem, they face by relying on the experience and professional advice of their colleagues.

Participant B3 stressed the importance of socialisation and networking with peers to help teachers to learn positive behaviours. “We learn a lot from each other and try to share what works best in the classroom with our colleagues. We need to show the new behaviours to the new guys and learn what works best” (participant B3). The socialisation and networking within school B has also encouraged principal B1 to share his leadership experiences with his subordinates as he noted that “there is interest among many junior teachers about learning and development. They are asking questions, they want peer-evaluation so that they can become better leaders and better teachers. I am trying to help them in identifying what needs to be improved and offer plans on how they can improve as teachers”. The feedback from the principal seems to

be taken into account as participant B7 acknowledged that “I really value the informal evaluations I have received for my work, they are always constructive. They never criticize you and punish you but show you how and where your work can be strengthened and improved upon”

However, the outcome of the networking experience was not always positive. Participant B2, for example, noted that “some teachers are reluctant to share their knowledge not only with people external to the school, but also with those working here”, fearing that knowledge diffusion is going to make them replaceable. The reluctance to share knowledge and exchange best practices was also fuelled by the “competition” between schools, for both the best teachers and the best students, and “some teachers believe that, if they keep all the knowledge in the school, they will gain advantage over all other schools in the region”. While only participant B2 has issues with establishing positive collaboration with his peers, the lack of structure for peer exchanges, shows their limited scope and value.

Barriers to Leadership Development

While the material above has identified some of the barriers to effective leadership development in Saudi Arabian schools, this topic received extensive attention from the participants and merits a separate theme. For some participants (notably B1 and B3), a key barrier to effective leadership development is the administrative workload associated with assuming higher ranking positions in school administration. This discourages teachers from developing themselves and pursuing promotion.

“Being a principal requires dealing with the reporting and statistics and placing judgements and evaluations about peers. It is not something that you normally do as a teacher. People are scared to try this out because they need to get out of their comfort zones and learn new skills. This is why we always lack people to take this job role”. (participant B1)

Similarly, participant B3 mentioned that “I don’t want to deal with writing reports that nobody is going to read just to satisfy someone’s perverse need to have everything reported”. Closely related to this idea is the view of participant B6, who noticed that,

even though the job of the school leader was to promote excellence, school leaders are often asked to engage in “tasks with no creativity in them” which further pulls people away not only from trying it, but also from developing skills that can help them in performing the job. There is a need for structural changes in schools, for them to become attractive to young teachers, because “teaching is a job of passion, and we need to keep that passion in everything we do” (participant B6). Since some of the participants in the study considered that the expected job and responsibilities of the leader were too tedious, they were disinclined to engage in developing their leadership potential.

The school environment can also act as a barrier to effective leadership development, especially if schools are guided by an authoritarian approach to leadership where the input of the subordinates is neither sought nor rewarded. According to Hofstede (2003), Saudi Arabia is characterised with high power distance, and as a result, managerial power is often concentrated at the top of the organisational hierarchy, as there is a general expectation for the employees to follow the decisions of their superordinates, who often assume the role of benevolent autocrats. Indeed, high power distance characterises power relations in the School B, as participant B6 mentioned “that sometimes the administration is not accepting any feedback and suggestions”. The organisational culture was deemed unsupportive of leadership development, according to participants 14 (B4?) and B2

“Authoritarian leadership is prejudicial to others because the administration assumes that they know best what needs to be done and they do not want to hear from us. This makes it very difficult to propose new ideas because you know that, if the leader does not like your idea, you will be merely ignored” (participant B2).

According to participant B7, “many people get demotivated when they are constantly put down by the administration” and the lack of a more participatory leadership style was preventing the school from achieving its broader mission and vision. It was perceived that a different type of leadership was required in the school context as “leaders must inspire and motivate people to look for new knowledge and new ideas” (participant B2)

and it was perceived that the traditional behaviours associated with authoritarian leadership, commonly exercised in the Saudi context, are not working well in the school environment. While the participants did not evoke the notion of authoritarian leadership explicitly in their responses, they noticed that the school principal “is pushing for his own vision and rarely consults us” (participant B3) which is one of the defining characteristics of such a leadership style. The demotivating effect of such leadership was witnessed as participant B2 acknowledged that “there were tensions and frictions with the administration”. However, the blame for the authoritarian culture in the school was not placed entirely upon the principal. Participant B5 noted that “schools are expected to follow what the Ministry of Education tells them to do, and those teachers who do not follow these are sanctioned.” Since authoritarian approaches are reinforced by the Ministry, the development of alternative approaches to leadership and management seems not to have been prioritised.

Another barrier to effective leadership development in school B relates to the demands arising from organisational and administrative issues. Participants complained about overcrowded classrooms (participant B1), lack of adequate equipment to support the learning process (participant B3), increasing job responsibilities (participant B4), lack of adequate coordination and communication between the teachers and the administration (participant B5) as well as insufficient training opportunities for those who want to become school leaders (participant B6). It was perceived that the expectations placed upon teachers were overwhelming and increasing. Responses by the senior teachers in the school (participant B4 and participant B7), who showed increased interest in leadership development, lamented that they feel overwhelmed with their current job responsibilities and were hesitant to add anything more to their already busy teaching schedule. The school principal, participant B1, also noted that both parents and students “have growing expectations of what the teachers must do in the classroom”. Those high expectations made some teachers more interested in personal development as they knew that “they should not disappoint children and parents” (participant B1). For many others, the constant pressure to improve performance has increased the “amount of stress they need to deal with” (participant B1). Three participants recognised that the

ability to deal with pressure and stress was a defining skill that the school leader needs to possess, again citing the perceived growing demands on teachers.

The interview responses reveal that the factors that interfere with school leadership development are largely organisational. They originate from the perceived obsolete practices of school management, the growing propensity for following authoritarian leadership practices in a setting that does not warrant them, the lack of support structures for those who aim to assume leadership roles, and the tendency to burden teachers with responsibilities and expectations that they cannot meet or exceed.

Overview

The interviews in school B show that self-development and personal desire to perform well at work has been the primary driver for teachers to invest in themselves and do whatever they could, with their limited resources and capabilities, to develop their leadership potential. Intrinsic motivation in schools A and B has been high because all participants perceived that they have a wider social role and that their work is going to make a tangible impact for students. Leadership development was important for the participants because of the high anticipatory socialisation with many preparing themselves for their potential future roles as school leaders, even though some of the participants were disillusioned by the rigid organisational culture and the lack of suitable promotion opportunities that would have encouraged their capacity development. However, developing school leaders without the resources and opportunities that the Tatweer programme provides is challenging, as their exclusion from the programme restricts opportunities for training. The lack of institutional support (in the form of the Tatweer programme) was not the only barrier mentioned by participants, as many of them lamented the growing nepotism and favouritism in schools, that undermine meritocratic practices, while others noticed that leadership development initiatives cannot be sustained if the school culture continues to be authoritarian.

The next chapter presents the findings from school C.

Chapter Six: Findings Case Study C

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews carried out at school C. Seven interviews were conducted, one with the principal of the school and six with junior and senior teachers (three from each group). School C is situated in an urban area of Najran and It was established 35 years ago. The school employs 32 teachers and has approximately 420 currently enrolled students. Despite the positive image that school C enjoys as one of the most prestigious institutions in the region, it was not selected to participate in the Tatweer programme.

Table 6.1 provides some background information about the research participants. To guarantee their confidentiality and anonymity, the names provided below are not the real names of the participants, but pseudonyms. The process of selecting participants was similar to that was used in schools A and B, as preference was given to teachers who taught in 3 key disciplines: maths, Arabic and English. For senior teachers, preference was given to those with the longest tenure and, as a result, the interviewed senior members in school 6 all had more than 10 years of teaching experience. This experience enabled them to reflect, not only on the current state of school leadership development initiatives in Najran, but also about the past initiatives that have been conducted along with their successes and challenges.

The interviews were held in Arabic, the native language of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Conducting the interview in Arabic helped in establishing rapport with the participants and in avoiding potential misunderstandings and ambiguities. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and the researcher was able to gather nearly five hours of recorded material. The interviews were analysed in the same way as for case studies A and B, as the recordings were transcribed and analysed thematically. The analysis produced six key themes which are similar to the themes discussed in chapters four and five:

- Development and self-development of school leaders
- Training and development

- Formal and informal strategies for leadership development
- The Tatweer programme
- Networking and socialisation
- Barriers to leadership development

Table 6.1: School C participants

Code		Name	Position	Experience
P15/3	C1	Arhab	Principal	12 years as head
P16/3	C2	Faya	Junior Arabic teacher	2 years
P17/3	C3	Husseen	Senior Arabic teacher	13 years
P18/3	C4	Maryq	Senior English teacher	14 years
P19/3	C5	Zyad	Senior Maths teacher	15 years
P20/3	C6	Shami	Junior Maths teacher	3 years
P21/3	C7	Yusef	Junior English teacher	4 years

Development and self-development of school leaders

Participants in school C recognised that being an effective change agent is an essential quality for a school leader. For participant C2, school leadership required “making a positive change in the school environment” while participant C7 mentioned that a “school leader is someone who is capable of liaising with the administration to solve the problems related to students’ affairs and the teaching staff”. Participant C1, who has assumed the key leadership role in school C for more than a decade, mentioned that his main goal in the past years was to “promote innovation in teaching throughout the school” and “getting rid of the bad practices”, indicating that school leadership requires managing and a sustainable positive transformation of the work environment. The participant also recognised that the training he received before assuming the leadership position has not helped him much in becoming an effective change agent. Instead, the principal preparation programme that was developed at the time was overly focused

upon helping him to understand and manage the administrative tasks associated with the position of the principal rather than with promoting his capacities to lead and manage change. "The preparation programme for principals focused more on clarifying the job requirements and what we need to do in order to fulfil those requirements.... The focus on the programme was upon the reporting requirements and how we can satisfy the expectations of the Ministry for reporting our work". However, it can be argued that the focus on reporting and internalising the job role was not a limitation of the principal preparation programme, because effective school leaders had to first become acquainted with the nature of the job, before they can produce meaningful change in the school environment.

When participants C2 and C7 were prompted to reflect on actions taken in school C to foster a positive environment, both noted that the school principal actively supports teachers in implementing their ideas and assists them in engaging with the parents and other administrative members. More specifically, once the teacher has developed an idea, the principal does not assume ownership of the idea, and the change management project, and lets the teachers lead it to completion. Participant C4 mentioned that he had an idea, a few years ago, to introduce an additional maths class for the students who were ahead of their peers, to prepare them better for the university exams. He said that the school principal helped him to prepare the curriculum for the class and to find the money to compensate the teachers who led those classes. However, the participant was thankful that he was given an opportunity to manage the project himself, as he was permitted to popularise the initiative among the students, teachers, and parents, to motivate prospective students to attend the classes, to develop the curricula and the exercises that the students had to complete during the class and to overcome the resistance of those who believed that the class is going to be a failure. "I really liked that I was left to manage the course and make it as I wanted it to be" (participant C4), reflecting that freedom of manoeuvre was essential for his self-development. When the participant was prompted to reflect how the experience impacted upon his leadership and change management skills, he said that:

“I had the opportunity to experience how difficult it is to develop a new curriculum. I needed one that covers the material that is not in the textbooks. I improved my project planning skills and I become a better negotiator. Convincing the parents that an extra class at school is going to help their kids, more than sending them to a private tutor, took time and effort. It was really challenging because I had to convince the parents to pay part of the costs of the course and part of the compensation for the teachers, and you know how difficult parents are when they hear about money”.(participant C4).

The experience of participant C7 further highlights that any initiative for development of school leadership needs to be practically oriented and provide the participants not only with opportunities of teaching how leadership is exercised (which was done in the seminars and workshops that the participants had attended), but also to allow them to practice various leadership skills and learn the skills by actually enacting leadership. The creation of an additional maths class is not an isolated example of change management and personal development organised in school C, but this particular initiative had long-term importance. As participant C2 noted

“The results of the students who participated in the maths course are around 15% higher than the results of the average student in our school. The average score the participants in the course get on the entrance exams in the university are higher than the scores we recorded before the introduction of the course”.

The experience of participant C2 suggests that organisational changes in the educational environment are possible as long as school leaders are provided with sufficient resources to carry out their initiatives and are allowed to lead the project themselves without interference from the principal and the school administration.

Such an approach to leadership development is not an accident, but rather part of the overall strategy that the school principal has in developing the potential of teachers in the school, as he claims:

“I want the teachers to be more involved in the management and administration of the school. They need to see the problems and the issues that principals deal

with on a daily basis and tell us how we can resolve those issues to improve the quality of the education we offer”.

The abundance of opportunities for leadership development in school C, discussed in the next section of the chapter, impacted on the perceived importance of self-development as part of the individual strategy for building leadership competences. The need for teachers to develop themselves, without relying too much on external support, was stressed by two teachers, who considered that self-development is the key approach through which school leaders shall be developed. Participant C3 mentioned that “each teacher must have their own plan and strategy on how they have to develop themselves so that they can meet the expectations of parents and students”. When the participant was prompted on what his own personal leadership development strategy contains, he said that his main priorities were to improve the quality of interactions he has with students, to enhance the delivery of the lecture material, and learn how to better help the struggling students with the course material so that they were not left behind in the group. Participant C3 also mentioned that a key objective for him in the next year was to make sure that he is able to learn how to inspire and motivate students to achieve more, as he believed that effective school leaders are the one who are able to inspire students to effectively realise their potential. Participant C7 also mentioned that self-development is an important component of any leadership development programme, because leadership is inherently tied to motivation and “a good leader is the one who shows how things can change by demonstrating his own personal example”. While the participant shared that he has developed his own personal development plan, with a strategy on how he can develop himself as a better teacher, he admitted that he has left out some of the leadership skills from his programme because he perceived that “it is too early for me to think about leadership. I am in school C only for 4 years, there is a lot ahead of me to learn”. This highlights the need for school principals to consider engaging the employees so that they can be motivated to continue with learning and developing their potential.

The evidence presented in this section indicates that school C has been able to create a culture of continuous development that encourages teachers not only to try new initiatives in practice, but also to develop their leadership skills.

Training and development of school leaders

School C has developed its own programme and initiatives to encourage teachers to engage in leadership activities. Participant C1 stated that one of the first things he did when he was hired as principal was to create a working group that included all the senior teachers. The purpose of the group was to encourage the teachers to work together in identifying the best pedagogical practices in both maths and sciences and to come up with ideas on how those practices can be implemented in the school. The senior teachers who participated in this working group spoke positively of the experience and were unanimous that the working group has helped them to ensure that their teaching methods are well-informed by relevant pedagogical practice. Participant C3 said that the working group has provided a good opportunity for “networking and collaboration between the teachers” and for “sharing good practices among the different members of the team”. Participant C4 considered that “the group meetings opened my eyes and showed me new approaches to teaching that I directly use in the classroom”. Since most of the participants equated school leadership with being able to teach effectively and efficiently in the classroom, and with applying the best pedagogical approaches, participation in a working group was perceived to be a positive step for their leadership development.

When asked whether the activities in the working group helped them to become better school leaders, senior teachers said that the experience helped them to “identify problems in the way the material has been taught and try to propose solutions for those problems” (Participant C5) and that working collaboratively in a working group has “empowered them to propose changes on the way the school has been managed” (participant C4). More specifically, the working group provided a formal platform through which the participants could channel different initiatives they had for the school, and to obtain feedback on those initiatives. Because the group included all senior teachers, an initiative proposed by the group had authority and was met with “far less scepticism by

the administration than the other ideas that the teachers had” (participant C4. This enabled the senior teachers to act as change agents and directly manage and influence the organisational transformation in school C.

For participant C1, the working group was important, not only for providing and receiving feedback on how teaching practices can be improved, but also on how the administrative practices and processes could be enhanced so that the administration supports rather than hinders the initiatives of the teachers. In the opinion of the school principal:

“Teachers had to learn to speak up and voice their concerns. We can change and improve. But to do so, the teachers must be able to speak their minds, and tell us what changes they want to see in the school. They must propose plans and solutions on how those changes are to be carried out. I hope that, as principal of this school, I was able to encourage them to be active, rather than passive”.

This answer is indicative of the important dimension of school leadership, namely that effective school leaders must have the ability to drive and manage change in a rigid organisational context. The administration of school C has been receptive towards new ideas on how the teaching process shall be improved and welcomed initiatives from both junior and senior teachers. Participant C7, for example, mentioned that the school has let him organise a debate tournament in English for his students, which was the first of its kind that has been organised in Najran. He acknowledged that he gained a lot of experience as an organiser because he had to “promote the tournament, manage the finance, seek external sponsors for the event” and those event and project management skills helped him to become a better organiser. In this process, the participant has not only received the permission of the school to use the school resources for the event, but also has received extensive feedback from both the principal and his colleagues on how the event should be conducted and organised which enabled him to “avoid making mistakes”. The freedom to organise such activities has provided the participant with an opportunity to learn by doing and helped him develop skills that he was not going to

learn in the standard classroom experience, including managerial skills that are characteristic of school leadership.

As evidenced from the discussion above, senior teachers were not the sole beneficiaries of the leadership development activities, conducted both formally and informally in school C. The junior school members were not only provided with a freedom to organise their own events (and thus encouraged to develop themselves as managers and organisers) but also subjected to rigorous evaluation and assessment through the year to ensure that the standard of teaching was maintained across the organisation. “What I wanted to do is to create an environment where everyone seeks and obtains feedback and where everyone is evaluated. Nobody shall fall behind because a school is only as good as it's worst performing teacher” (participant C1). For this reason, a peer review process was introduced, where teachers were asked to attend lessons given by their colleagues and rate their performance. While such practices are standard in education, what was surprising in school C is how often those evaluations were carried out and the beneficial impact they were perceived to have, not only upon the performance of the person evaluated, but also upon the personal development of the evaluator.

“it takes skill to evaluate the work of a colleague and I think that I did not do very well the first few times that I provided evaluations. But, with time, I have gradually improved.... Today I can provide meaningful feedback to my colleagues and offer them suggestions on how they can improve upon their performance in the classroom” (C3).

Similarly, participant C5, who has been both provider and receiver of such feedback, said that the regular peer-review process has helped him to “learn from colleagues” and has showed him that “teachers experience the same problems in the classroom” and that they can borrow from the experience of their peers on how they have resolved conflicts in the past. All participants spoke positively about the peer review process, suggesting that the leaders in school C have been able to build a culture that promotes innovation and personal development, critical for the establishment of the leadership skills of the participants. Both formal and informal strategies for leadership development

have been introduced in the school, including but not limited to providing peer feedback, encouraging teachers to work collaboratively in working groups, and supporting the school and the administration for developing new strategies that help teachers to move from being passive employees to engaged school leaders.

Formal and informal strategies for leadership development

The participants were asked to consider what initiatives have been advanced to support their training and development as school leaders and it was noted that formal and informal strategies have been used to promote employee engagement and development. The driving force behind this process was the school principal, participant C1, who appears to have moved away from the authoritarian leadership models, in favour of a more democratic leadership style that encouraged teachers to come together and solve school problems in a more collaborative manner. For example, participant C2 said that “the atmosphere in school C is unique. You can speak freely to the administration about the problems you face and you will receive relevant advice. This is the best school I have worked in so far”. Participant C4 also praised the school principal for creating an atmosphere of tolerance by “personally encouraging teachers to take initiatives in developing new curricular and extracurricular activities”. These comments indicate building an organisational culture that encourages innovation and creativity and supports leadership development and self-development initiatives. Speaking about the organisational culture in school C, participant C4 mentioned that he is:

“not afraid to speak up when things go wrong. You can always come to the administration and provide them with new ideas and show them what you have been working on. They have their demands, but they are receptive to new suggestions”.

When the participant was asked how the school administration helped him in his own leadership development, the participant noted that they have never rejected his requests for attending conferences and workshops and he has received time off to prepare for those events. He added that this is more than many schools in the area are willing to do for their teachers.

The participants also acknowledged that the school administration is interested in promoting initiatives for personal development, even when those initiatives require money or resources. Participants C6, C4 and C2 mentioned that school C has set aside some money that would cover teachers' expenses when they travel and participate in educational conferences. "The school really cares and wants to invest in people. If there was a conference that I need to attend, they will cover my expenses. If I want to invite an external consultant to the school, they will cover his consulting fees" (participant C2). Other participants also mentioned that they had been provided with opportunities for attending seminars and conferences that covered a variety of areas from promoting research in maths and sciences (participant C7), to helping participants in managing conflict with troubled teens and students (participant C3), to developing their leadership capacities (participants C5 and C4).

However, when asked to what extent those conferences have helped them to develop their leadership capacities, participants provided diverse opinions. Participant C7 mentioned that the conferences he attended were "Informative and helped me to exchange experience with my colleagues" but also lamented that "you cannot take much from a conference that lasts only for two days". Similar concerns were present in the responses of the other participants, who noted that conferences and seminars had the main objective to promote the research and practice of the lecturers who organise them and did not provide an opportunity for collaborative problem-solving and more active engagement through which the participant can develop their own critical thinking skills and managerial potential. For example, participant C5 observed that:

"I have attended plenty of conferences and seminars in the past 10 years. You sit on a chair whole day; listening to what the other has to say. I am not saying that those talks are useless..... What I think is missing [in the current leadership development programmes] are workshops in which we can directly practice what we learn, we need to learn by practice and receive feedback to learn effectively new approaches to learning".

In addition to failing to provide practical experience, the Ministry of Education seminar programmes were criticised for prioritising the development of subject-specific

knowledge over the development of soft skills. For participant C1, the focus on subject-specific knowledge in seminars and conference is necessary “because the Ministry knows that the lack of sufficient preparation for the teachers is the main reason why Saudi students cannot achieve the same mastery in subjects as the students in Europe or America”. However, he also criticised the Ministry of Education seminar programmes for being overly focused upon improving the competences of the poorest performing teachers. He observed that their main aim was to help those who struggle to “maintain the attention of the students in the classroom” and support them in case they “lack sufficient preparation in their discipline”. However, the junior participants said that the Ministry of Education seminar programme was useful for them, because it helped them “to meet with people who have taught maths and sciences for years and were willing to share their experiences with them” (participant C6). This participant also mentioned that participation in the seminars has provided him with new perspectives so that he can resolve more efficiently the emerging conflicts in the classroom and how he can encourage students to collaborate better with one another.

The participants acknowledged that having sufficient mastery in the subject they teach is an essential part of being an effective school leader as it “helps them to become an authority in the classroom” (participant C7) and that authority is essential to maintain a productive learning atmosphere in the school. However, this is not enough for building the leadership competences of the participants. Indeed, when the participants were asked to reflect on how the current programmes focused upon teachers’ development should be improved, they commented that the Ministry should consider developing strategies that can enhance their “decision-making skills” (participant C6) especially for planning and delivering an effective lesson. Participant C2 recognised that being a school leader is a stressful endeavour and additional attention shall be paid on helping teachers to develop stress management capabilities, especially since the workload school leaders have is far greater than what is expected from ordinary teachers. Participant C2 argued that “we need to learn to prioritise our mental health. School leaders must be shown how they can cope when they work under stress and manage with tight deadlines” The participant also lamented that the current initiatives for leadership development tend to focus too much on the administrative aspects of the job

and do not help teachers to develop their capacities to resolve conflicts, both inside the classroom and outside it. Participant C4 also recognised that

“a good leader shall be able to motivate the students not only to learn what is in the book. He must motivate them to continue learning and developing themselves outside the classroom and engage them in a range of extra-curricular activities. I think, as teachers, we still need to learn how to instil that passion towards learning in students because, in my opinion, very few people can do it”.

It seems that the current programmes for teachers' leadership development in Saudi Arabia are perceived by school C participants to emphasise too much the teaching and pedagogical aspects of the job, and do not recognise the need for a teacher to have strong inter-personal skills to be able to address the growing number of responsibilities.

The Tatweer Programme

Although School C did not participate in the Tatweer programme, the participants discussed its design, the selection process, and the programme's role in promoting excellence in schools. Participant C1 emphasised that even though his school is not included, “the Tatweer programme is helping Saudi Arabia by introducing smart classrooms and supporting Saudi students in knowing how to actively use new technologies”. While some participants (C2 and C4) decided not to comment about the programme, as they admitted that they were not very much aware of it, the other teachers seemed to believe that the primary focus of the Tatweer programme was supporting the introduction of the new technologies in the classroom, rather than supporting school leadership development. “I think it is a great initiative because it shows that Saudi Arabia wants to become a regional leader in innovation technologies” (participant C7), as the programme is perceived as an important pillar for the development of a knowledge-based economy of Saudi Arabia. Similarly, participant C5 commented that “Tatweer spends most of its money on technological procurement. It is mostly a programme focused on school innovation. I know that Tatweer sponsors provide money for educational seminars and training, but this is not what the programme is focused on”. Such answers indicate that most participants do not see the value of the Tatweer programme as a channel through which leadership development in

schools can be promoted and this suggests that the Ministry of Education should conduct stronger information campaigns that demonstrate how Tatweer can help the professional development and realisation of individual teachers.

When the participants were asked whether the Tatweer programme can help in leadership development, they provided diverse answers. For participant C1, the programme is “helpful [as] it offers teachers’ opportunities for learning and development”, recognising that human capital development is the key objective of the programme. Participant C3 also mentioned that Tatweer is important for the personal development of teachers across Saudi Arabia because it “is built on the practices that are used for teachers’ development in the Western countries.” By linking the programme with Western practice, the participant thus seems to automatically accept it as valid due to seemingly sound and validated methodology. This consideration is also reflected in the response of participant C6 who stated that “we need to learn from the experience of the other countries. If those strategies have helped in developing the leadership potential of their teachers, I think it can also have huge success in Saudi Arabia”. Four of the five participants who commented on the programme said that they would like their school to be included in the development because they believed that “programmes like Tatweer are the key towards achieving educational excellence” (C7). Participant C1 also mentioned that inclusion in the Tatweer programme would increase the financial resources of his school and enable him to set aside money for extracurricular and learning activities for teachers to assist in their professional development.

However, participant C6 expressed scepticism about whether the Tatweer programme would have the desired effect in schools. He noted that the schools participating in it use “rigid teaching schedules” and “formalised assessment methods” which inevitably reduce teachers’ autonomy in the classroom.

“I think that Tatweer prioritises getting good results from the students but does this at the expenses of the methods used. It forces teachers to use materials that are not adapted well for the Saudi context and this really constrains what teachers can do in the classroom

In that respect, participant C6 praised the autonomy that he is given in school C and said that he is afraid that he would lose some of that autonomy if the school is included in Tatweer. However, participant C1 acknowledged that, “if the teachers have the right capabilities and skills, they will be able to enjoy autonomy and independence in the classroom. Tatweer is promoting teachers’ growth and personal development and in effect it is helping the teachers to attain the autonomy they want”. It must be recognised here that none of the participants have participated in the Tatweer programme so that their opinions are based on anecdotal evidence or information that they have obtained from colleagues and from the Ministry of Education.

Participant C3 also mentioned that the Tatweer programme is not adequately supporting teachers’ development in Saud Arabia:

“Because the programme is based on foreign experiences, but the context and the needs of the Saudi Arabian teachers are quite different. What we need are programmes that consider the Arab experience and Arab context and only this programme can help the schools achieve educational excellence”.

The participants in school C also expressed concerns about the selection process of the schools included in the programme. Participant C1 noted that “I think we need to reform Tatweer and open it up to all schools, even if this means that each individual school that participates in it will get less money. We are dividing schools into those who participate in Tatweer and those who do not”. This response suggests that the Tatweer programme is creating a two-tier educational system that does not promote educational equity as “every student and every teacher must have equal access to high quality education” (participant C1). Similarly participant C7 believes that the Tatweer programme should be reformed to provide more opportunities for growth and development for teachers, especially since the programme’s objective to modernise the school IT infrastructure is nearly complete.

Networking and Socialisation

Networking and socialisation with peers play a role in the process of personal growth and maturity because the regular interactions between teachers help them in becoming

familiar with the expectations of their profession and in developing as better leaders. “We learn from each other every single day”, said participant C2, reflecting on the open atmosphere within school C that facilitates the organisational socialisation of the members. The organisational socialisation of the teachers was also enabled by the regular meetings and workshops teachers in the school had during which they could freely exchange best practices or ask for help to resolve the different problems they have experienced in the classroom. Participant C1 mentioned that he has personally encouraged the formation of the working groups and noted that he has an open-door policy for anyone “who struggles with their job and with carrying out their duties” believing that those initiatives have encouraged the teachers’ development and self-development. Both the junior and senior members spoke favourably about how the regular workshops improved their leadership capacities, recognising that the workshops have provided them with “knowledge on how to address the conflicts in the classroom” (participant C3), with “ideas how to teach challenging material” (participant C5), with “proposals on how to best organise my time to cover the curriculum” (participant C6), which the participants considered essential for their personal growth and development. Socialisation with their peers helped the participants not only in learning best practices from their colleagues, but also in developing a sense of community that further encouraged some of them to take positive action in relation to their own personal development. As participant C4 said, “we are all dealing with the same problems and there is so much we can learn from each other. I am participating in workshops and seminars, not only because they will help me perform better, but because I will learn things that I can pass to my colleagues”.

The junior and senior teachers also acknowledged that the organisational culture of school C is an important driver for their development. Participant C7, for example, has recognised that “nobody wants to be the teacher whose students get the lowest grades in the exams, because this will speak badly for the school”. Similarly, participant C2 noted that his main driver to develop himself was the perceived need to catch up with more experienced teachers because he felt embarrassed that he is not as skilful as some other members of the team. However, it must be recognised that such a perceived high-performance culture might intimidate some employees, especially those

who struggle to achieve the same results as their colleagues. While most of the junior teachers recognised that organisational culture in the school is motivating them to perform better, and to develop new skills and abilities, participant C6 recognised that part of the perceived pressure at work is a direct consequence of the fact that the standards set at school C are too high. “Sometimes things get quite stressful here because the expectations have been set too high”

However, while organisational socialisation and personal socialisation were strongly promoted in school C, the socialisation of the teachers with the local community has been largely missing. Three of the participants (C3, C5, and C7) mentioned that improving the school’s relations with the local community is an aspect which school C has to change because “the school needs to take feedback and communicate effectively with the parents and custodians and to participate more actively in community initiatives” (participant C5). For participant C7, the school should act as an educational hub that is not narrowly focused on making sure that the material in the book has been taught but also to support the local community in their educational initiatives. He argued that the school leadership has not been able to participate actively in many of the local initiatives because they believe that they might not be culturally appropriate for the mixed school audience. However, the participant argued that “we need our leader to recognize diversity and be able to effectively manage diversity in schools”. As participant C3 admitted, the school struggles, not only to promote diversity, but also to resolve conflicts that emerge between the parents and the administration, and this is increasing pressure in the school. The participant attributed conflict to the lack of adequate demonstration of conflict resolution skills, because “the school administration sometimes is very hostile towards parents who come to them with complaints, believing that they only protest about grades and have unsubstantiated demands about teaching”. The lack of diversity management training, and the lack of conflict resolution skills, in the opinion of those three participants, are missing in the leadership development programmes within the school. Participant C7 argues that effective leaders should be able to promote positive relations with the local communities and he recommended that leadership development programmes should focus more on promoting inter-personal skills.

Barriers to leadership development

The participants were also prompted to identify the barriers and challenges that school leaders face in their personal development. One notable barrier was the perceived lack of institutional support from the Ministry of Education for improving leadership competences, as participant C1 noted. “The Ministry of Education places excessive emphasis on helping teachers develop as teachers capable to deliver the material effectively to the student. There is no emphasis on the soft skills in many of the programmes they promote”. Participant C3 also lamented that the Ministry is prioritising only the programmes that focus on expanding teachers’ competences on specific subjects, such as maths and foreign languages, and neglecting promoting similar development opportunities for professionals who teach the Arabic language.

Some participants commented that the training and development opportunities available to teachers are not structured properly and, as a result, some teachers are not included. For example, participant C1 said that “many schools receive no information about the available learning and development opportunities, and I think that the Ministry does not choose well who is invited to those events and who is not”. The proposition that the Ministry of Education is too selective in promoting career development opportunities for teachers could not be verified independently, but this participant commented that there is bias in the manner that career development opportunities are designed within the Ministry of Education that limit their outreach to some potential participants.

While four of the participants all had more than 10 years’ experience as teachers, junior teachers do not have employment stability and a clear path for career development that can motivate them to invest in becoming effective leaders. The problem was not that schools did not provide sufficient job security, but rather that some junior teachers struggled to see themselves being in the profession in the next several years. Participant C6 mentioned that he likes the teaching profession, and the daily interactions with his students, but also that “teaching is emotionally exhausting, and some students are so difficult to deal with’ and this stress, that he experiences on a daily basis, is prompting him to consider changing occupation. This inevitably impacts upon his development and self-development plans, as the participant admitted he is

turning away invitations for conferences and seminars, because he does not see a future for himself as a teacher, let alone as a school leader.

Similar concerns were present in the response of participant C3, who mentioned that “new teachers do not intend to stay in the profession for long and they do not have motivation to develop themselves”. Participant C1 also lamented that school C is constantly looking for new teachers to replace those who have decided to pursue other careers, but also mentioned that it is difficult to motivate teachers to stay in the profession due to the inadequate compensation incentives and the increased workload they have faced, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The lack of financial incentives for teachers was also mentioned by two junior teachers (C2 and C6) who noted that the school does not have a specific policy for rewarding the teachers who invested time and effort to develop themselves despite the sophisticated programmes for capacity development that were promoted by the school itself. “Promotions are hard to come by and the increase of remuneration is minimal, and this does not motivate teachers to spend so much time and money to earn this promotion” (participant C3).

Another barrier to leadership development is the perceived disproportionate increase of administrative responsibilities for leadership positions in school C. For participant C1, the most significant challenge he experienced as a school leader was the need to be responsive to all the new “initiatives that come from the Ministry” even though he argued that many of them are not well considered. Participant C4 commented that school leadership is associated with increased administrative requirements, as “every promotion in the school comes with increased administrative workloads.” While the participants said that conflict between the administration and the teaching body are rare, they were not that happy with the growing reporting requirements. Participant C7 noted that “many of the administrative requirements are difficult and time-consuming to fulfil” and this detracts from his teaching responsibilities. This view was supported by participant C6, who recommended that the school must change the administrative and reporting requirements it has for teachers, because they increase disproportionately the workload and stress of teachers. Similarly participant C4 recognised that the leadership roles have become intimidating because they are inevitably associated with “a lot of

administrative responsibilities and overwhelming expectations” and there is a fear that the person will not be able to cope with the increased demands. Concern about the burgeoning requirements associated with the leadership role is a barrier to teacher participation in leadership development.

Insufficient inter-cultural training was another barrier to effective leadership development in schools. The participant recognises that public schools in Saudi Arabia are welcoming students from different cultural and religious backgrounds so “that leaders shall interact with and celebrate the community diversity to ensure that everyone is feeling integrated” (participant C5). This finding was rather surprising because public schools tend to have less ethnic and cultural diversity than private and international schools in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, it might point to the growing diversification of students and the need to understand its implications for educational leaders in Saudi Arabia.

Teachers claim that they have not been provided with sufficient diversity training, and they are worried that they cannot cater for the needs of all students. In that respect, participant C7 mentioned that he does not feel comfortable “working in a diverse classroom” because he is afraid that he can say something that will offend students from other religions and backgrounds, and he is making sure that the examples he gives in the class “are suitable for students of all religions and all cultures”. Participant C3 also mentioned that one of the key reasons why school leaders are unprepared for diversity is because the curriculum in Saudi Arabia is focused on promoting Saudi Nationalism and discourages the promotion of diversity in schools, even though the participant admitted that it is much needed for a healthy atmosphere in the classroom. He added that school leaders must be capable of promoting an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion for all students in the school.

The findings show that the main barriers to leadership development in schools are the growing administrative responsibilities, and increased stress and workload, which are not accompanied by an equivalent increase in remuneration. The participants also suggested that the training programmes of the Ministry of Education are prioritising the teaching of specific subjects over other important skills such as diversity management

and soft skills. These comments suggest that the current approaches to leadership development, not only in school C but also in Saudi Arabia, should be reviewed.

Overview

The interviews in school C show that the development of leadership competences can be best accomplished if the organisational culture of the institution is democratic and open, where everyone can freely give and receive feedback, and receive help for the various problems that emerge during the work process. Promoting a culture of excellence within the school has also helped the participants to internalise school objectives, and to spend extra time and effort in developing their leadership competences. However, as the experience in school C shows, effective leadership development is not dependent solely on the willingness of the teachers to engage in self-development initiatives but also upon the capacity of the school administration to provide structures and means to encourage the teachers to engage in leadership behaviours. Establishing working groups dedicated to the improvement of working processes, helping the teachers to conduct extra-curricular activities, and providing the resources needed for attending conferences and seminars were the key ways through which school C attempted to encourage leadership development. More importantly, by rejecting authoritarian forms of leadership, the school was successful, not only in developing an organisational culture that incentivises self-development, but also enables teachers to practice leadership roles.

The experience in school C highlights that, even schools outside the Tatweer programmes, can develop their own independent approaches for leadership development, although an expansion of the programmes is necessary to provide alternative means and strategies for how leadership development should happen. More importantly, the Ministry of Education should find a way to incentivise, through increased compensation, junior teachers to stay in the profession for long enough so that they can consider developing themselves as effective leaders.

The next chapter presents the findings from school D.

Chapter Seven: School D

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews carried out at school D. The participants offered novel insights on how leadership development occurs in the Saudi school system mainly because this school is a participant in the Tatweer programme. The school was established in 1974 and currently employs a staff of 25 teachers with a total of 364 students. The teaching body is also quite young as it has slightly more junior educators compared to their senior ones. School D does not have many senior teachers in English, and the only senior teacher who was available for the interview was selected. The participants were selected so that the researcher could achieve academic diversity by choosing those whose experience could tell the most about the leadership development practices in the particular school, with a balance of senior and junior teachers.

Table 7.1 provides information about the selected interview participants along with details regarding their professional standing at school D. The names provided in the table are not participants' real names but pseudonyms that were used to safeguard the participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 7.1: School D participants

Code [interview]	Code [research]	Name	Position	Experience
P22/4	D1	Darm	Junior Maths teacher	3 years
P23/4	D2	Saqer	Senior Arabic teacher	18 years
P24/4	D3	Ahasn	Senior Maths teacher	20 years
P25/4	D4	Badr	Principal	17 years
P26/4	D5	Faheem J.	Junior English teacher	2 years
P27/4	D6	Naser	Junior Arabic teacher	3 years
P28/4	D7	Khalid	Senior English teacher	16 years

The interviews were conducted in Arabic, including with the English teachers, because the researcher believed that using participants' first language would create a more natural and comfortable environment. Being required to answer in English would present an unnecessary challenge to the normal flow of the conversation. Furthermore, interviewing in English might hinder the participants from sharing as much useful and detailed information, compared to when using their native tongue, as they would feel more self-conscious about their performance during the interview. Most of the interviews took between 45 to 50 minutes.

The analysis produced six key themes, similar to those discussed in chapters four, five, and six.

- 1) Development and self-development of school leaders
- 2) Training and development of school leaders
- 3) The Tatweer programme
- 4) Networking and socialisation.
- 5) Barriers to Leadership Development
- 6) Strategies for overcoming those barriers

Development and Self-Development of School Leaders

The data provided by the respondents on the meaning of leadership, and how leaders can pursue self-development, was wide-ranging and addressed different subjects. The researcher has collated responses from disparate interview material and has decided to initially explore the concept of leadership in general as well as the understanding of leadership self-development in a school environment. Some interviewees, especially among the older generation, entertained a more formal and rigid idea about what it constitutes to be a leader at the school. D3 and D7 specifically often used the terms “manage”, “control” and “review” in relation to leadership, whereas all three of the younger respondents talked more about soft skills such as showing “fairness and equitable treatment towards others, both teachers and students” (D1), “equality and fairness” (D5) and “social intelligence, effective listening, anything that relates to

interpersonal skills” (D6). The older participants seemed to have only a vague idea of what leadership comprises and stands for, and they often conflated it with being a manager. However, D4, the principal, made a fine distinction between the two concepts by mentioning that:

“Leaders are always managers, in some way. But managers are not always leaders. And I’m not even referring to that awful practice of micromanaging your employees. Managers are more on the administrative and control side; they review what people do or don’t do. But leaders must have the big picture in mind at all times, they must be visionaries if they want to inspire and motivate others.

Related to this, D5 also mentioned the values and principles underpinning the definition and scope of leadership. He talked about leaders needing to have “patience both with themselves and with others because self-development is the core of the learning process”. He also mentioned the need for leaders to be able to “enhance team spirit”, which aligned with D1’s perspective on the need for leaders to be team players first, and only then become leaders. D2 also discussed the need for any school leader to go through the same path of development - to start from the teacher ranks, get to know the school environment and his colleagues, and continuously try to improve his skills so that he deserves the rank of a leader, or as he called it, “a first among equals”.

Self-development was also an ambiguously defined concept for many of the respondents, but they seemed to all agree on the need for leaders to be autonomous and innovative enough to pursue their own ideas and implement their own projects. In this regard, the principal’s efforts and strategy were mentioned and praised by the majority of junior and senior teachers as being open, transparent and equitable. D6 favourably described the principal as a “positive agent of change, who is not afraid of taking on new challenges and who constantly teaches us what it means to be a leader”. D7 commended the principal’s leadership style, which represented “just the right mix of exerting control and providing us with the freedom that we need in our own professional affairs”. D5 centred more upon the principal’s constant drive for innovation, positivity and creativity, and that he “openly welcomed any criticism towards his own ideas and actions during our bi-weekly meetings as a team”.

When asked about his own development (or self-development) as a leader, D4, the principal, commented that he had probably gained more from being a self-starter and having sufficient self-discipline, rather than relying upon the “numerous formal seminars, conferences and courses that I have taken and that have promised to make me a better leader”. He added that, if he had relied solely upon external factors or events to turn him into a leader, he would not have achieved that goal.

The senior teachers viewed self-development, especially relating to leadership, as a practice that remains tied to formalised programmes and expected some degree of involvement from the school principal. D7, for example, argued that the principal must be involved in training” or “in addressing management issues at the school”. D3 provided the opposite perspective whereby the principal would attend teachers’ classes as a neutral observer and then provide “valuable feedback on how we could address our problems in the classroom but in a balanced way [...] not being intrusive or disrespectful towards us”.

In contrast, the junior teachers believed, much like D4, that self-development could contribute more to nurturing their leadership potential than official training. They respected an open exchange of ideas, especially with senior teachers, and the importance of self-motivation. As D1 concluded, “if you’re not motivated enough, it shows, and your students won’t be either”. Similarly, D5 concentrated on the need to have “a culture that values and displays healthy ambition to improve oneself” where anyone who slacks off or fails to fit that culture will automatically leave. D6 hinted at the valuable practice of teachers learning from one another and from their students on how to become better at their jobs and enhance critical leadership skills such as active listening, empathy, and assertiveness.

Training and Development of School Leaders

The interviewees were questioned about the formal leadership programmes available for them both at the school level (as it is a part of the Tatweer programme) and in general in Saudi Arabia. The answers received were varied, with a few of the interviewees having gone through such training, and many expressing constructive criticism regarding the current formal training available to them. According to half of the

respondents, D1, D3, D5 and D7, some teachers were not even made aware of the training opportunities offered at the governmental or institutional levels. Several interviewees claimed that leadership programmes are not known to them because they are not school principals and that there are equivalent programmes for senior or junior teachers. However, this is contradicted by D6's response, who mentioned that:

“Apart from in-person conferences and seminars, we also had some online options. These were especially well-attended during the pandemic period. We had courses administered through Zoom and Teams. But we also had some lectures and classes over social media channels”.

D2 also discussed at some length the variety of courses that were made available to head and senior teachers through the Tatweer programme. He particularly enjoyed the course on the different leadership styles and how to recognise these, as well as the courses on public speaking, active listening and how to develop one's own leadership potential with little external guidance. D2 only remarked about the “brevity of these courses, which did not allow the mentors to go into detail, which left many questions unanswered”.

However, despite the relatively positive feedback from Participant D6, it also became clear that he felt that most programmes were too generic and not tailored specifically to the context of the school or even the country. Similarly, participant D6 compared the Tatweer programme training available to teachers with the training he had received outside the school environment. He argued that the training not managed by the educational administration was “less academic and more professionally oriented, which allowed me to visualise how I can put my new knowledge and my new skills to practice and even to the test”. Participant D7 had taken a lot of training throughout his long academic career (though not at the present school), and he also praised the many conferences and seminars which had seemed better suited to his professional growth as a school leader compared to training programmes offered by the government and by the Ministry of Education.

There was a general feeling among the participants that leadership development programmes are being conducted mainly to allow participants to attain professional

certificates while the programme content was considered somewhat superficial and not as useful as the programme objectives intended. D2 mentioned the need for an “inherent desire for professional development” among the teachers, without which even the most comprehensive training would fail to “instil the proper attitude for professional development”. D4 shared this argument as he painted a bleak picture of so-called leadership figures that attend formal training only for that training’s sake without having an overarching and self-development goal in mind. He also claimed that “going in for the accomplishment certificate, or so that you can brag about how big of a leader you are because you’ve been trained, is not remotely related to leadership”. In a similar manner, D4, the principal, mentioned that he would rather have teachers working together with him that have not received any official training in leadership but are either natural-born leaders or can learn on their own how to become leaders compared to ineffectual and self-assured teachers that rely only on the prestige of their training:

“You might call me old-school, but I firmly believe in teaching everything to people. And I’m not entirely convinced that leadership is something that can be taught. I’ve read up quite a lot on the subject. If you take a look at the various leadership styles [...] participative, transactional, authoritarian and so on [...] then which style do you choose to teach? And is that style suitable for everyone? I don’t think so”.

When asked about the most important factors for formal leadership training to be effective, D1 suggested the importance of a constant exchange of ideas and best practices, especially drawing knowledge from “the experience of administrative staff [...] and higher-ups who have a longer tenure on the job than you do, but in a formal, training setting rather than simply talking outside of class”. D3 considered the need for “empowering school leaders” through providing them with sufficient autonomy to use their own creativity and to pursue self-development even once official training has been completed. D5 and D6 highlighted the importance of having a “passion for work” along with an “interest in self-development and incentivisation”. D2 also added:

“The Ministry of Education needs to do a better job of motivating school leaders and school teachers. For instance, we could have something like professional

development centres. These would follow a very [...] carefully planned programme.... they should have [...] experienced trainers.”

According to the participants, the selection criteria for formal leadership programmes are not clearly understood and known, mainly due to lack of communication from the Ministry. D2 believes that the criteria encompass the level of professional and/or academic competence alongside formal qualifications and CVs, but he was not sure whether these were the main benchmarks for selection. D7 also talked about “amassed academic and professional experience” as very important factors when selecting potential participants for training programmes. Other respondents, including D1 and D6, discussed terms such as “creative leadership projects” (D1) and “openness to self-development” (D6), which points to an attitude among the junior teachers of favouring more modern values, such as creativity and open-mindedness in leaders, as opposed to formal credentials. The principal (D4) seems to have taken a middle path between the two perspectives as he mentioned both “competences”, along with “openness to self-development”, as the selection criteria, which might allow him to empathise with both the senior and more traditional members of the teaching staff and with the younger and more modern-thinking juniors.

The formal training available to school leaders in Saudi Arabia, and at school D, were considered by the majority of participants to be positive developments in the right direction, but also that they often lacked focus or depth or were not properly tailored to the ‘real-life environment’ of Saudi schools. There was a lack of awareness and knowledge about the existence and scope of such programmes as well as concerns regarding the selection criteria for potential leaders to enrol in them. The respondents also stressed the importance of inner motivation for participating leaders in such programmes as opposed to taking part in training for the sole and superficial purpose of gaining prestige, but with limited knowledge or skills.

The Tatweer Programme

Many of the interviewees, despite being employed by a school that actively embraces and utilises the Tatweer programme, were not completely familiar with its scope and objectives. D5, who had just shifted jobs and had been employed by the school most

recently, had heard of the programme before, but he was not entirely certain about “the exact details and how integrated the programme is at the school”. The rest of the respondents provided various and sometimes conflicting opinions concerning the programme’s effects upon the educational system in general and upon their school.

D3 praised the programme for the way in which it “attempts to change our mindset and our habits of work. It wants to modernise our classrooms and our methods. It is made to tie together what it means to be a teacher and a leader - professionally”. He was appointed as a senior teacher, which was a new role created by the Tatweer programme, for the purpose of delegating authority and making the entire school hierarchy flatter. D2 and D7 had also recently been given this role and were part of the new decentralisation initiative, but they remarked that it was “slowly developed” and also “implemented step by step, probably because it’s difficult to force a new mindset”. D2, in particular, expressed his enthusiasm for scared this reform and claimed that he had never been placed in a similar position of power: “At first, I was because I was given a lot of responsibilities. In a way, I have to look after junior teachers in my discipline [Arabic] and to keep track of how well or badly they perform”. D6 was placed on the opposite side of this equation as he was under the “command” of D2, and he also appeared to welcome this change as it made him feel “closer to those making the decisions - even though I was placed under a separate [...] unit, I felt more empowered than before because I was directly speaking with my superior and could raise my problems [...] or voice my ideas”.

D4, who, as the principal, possesses the most extensive knowledge of the programme, argued that the programme is “the first step on our journey to developing a modern educational system that would be on a par with global standards”. He was particularly well-disposed towards the idea of creating professional communities within schools, and of forging bonds between school principals and teachers through the mediation of skilled trainers. D4, along with most of the younger teachers, including D1 and D5, also applauded the attempt of the programme to instil values in the participating teachers such as autonomy, creativity, trust and open communication, self-motivation and enhancing decision-making capabilities.

D4 expounded more upon the concept of the so-called Excellence Team, rather than on the new seniority positions delegated to older teachers. Out of all the interviewed teachers, D1, D6, D2 and D7 were a part of this team whose job, in the words of D4, is to “initiate change for the better and identify areas that could use some improvement”. D7 gave the example of the new curriculum proposed for those students in the middle grades as a ‘test flight’ for the new concept. Specifically, he claimed, “we rearranged some subjects, English included, and tried to incorporate best practices from other schools to make the material more modern and more interesting”. No one on the team expressed any negative thoughts towards this change but all welcomed it. D1 also underlined that it is still work in progress and that they are learning how to enhance the curriculum “by reviewing how the students are responding”. D4 mentioned that the plan going forward is to finalise the curriculum and to try to instigate similar changes for the other grades in the school, but he also stressed that his involvement was purposefully limited “so that teachers, and the students on the Excellence team, because class representatives are also involved there, could make use of their freedom and creativity for the better”. Another next step would be the inclusion of parents and external educational mentors and experts on the team so that they could provide alternative opinions and insights.

The positive aspects of adopting the programme were also highlighted by D1, D6 and D2. The idealistic and ambitious outreach and strategy were praised by these teachers, especially considering the onset of Tatweer in 2007, when the concept of modernised, smart and digital-related learning was still fairly new for many schools, teachers and parents. D1 and D6, both junior members of the teacher team, liked the modernising ideas of the programme and emphasised how it could potentially make them better leaders in their work environment. According to D1, “when you choose an innovative approach, you always need leaders as the early adopters and as those that need to clear a path for everyone else”. Additionally, D6 praised the spirit of openness and cooperation that lay at the core of Tatweer’s ideology, and believed that “working as a team, as a school, would not damage our individual leadership capabilities, but instead would allow us to learn from one another and strive together”. In his view, the programme could be enhanced and it could foster leadership among its schools and

teachers in allowing them to voice their own opinions and share in “the creation of a better strategy that would affect us all”. Furthermore, D5 said that coming into this new school had started with self-evaluation under the Tatweer programme that all teachers had to undertake. He found the experience to be extremely positive and also pronounced himself in favour of the repetition of this self-evaluation at regular time intervals. He described it as “bringing this rigid, public branch closer to the real world and even to the world of business where your manager evaluates you but you also have to evaluate yourself”. D4 mentioned that the self-evaluation form was flexible and open enough to allow for teachers to think out of the box. According to his own words, “it is no longer about how well your students are doing - whether they all got perfect scores, passed all their exams or are simply quiet and obedient in class [...] it’s also about looking at teachers as well-rounded individuals, at their values and ideas”.

In contrast, D4’s remarks were more oriented towards the role of Tatweer in facilitating school leadership. He pronounced himself very much in favour of “forcing each school to take responsibility for its policies and practices, for how its teachers enhance their skills and how their students are performing in class”. At the same time, though, he felt that the school would have benefited more from redistribution of power, or providing the principal and some senior leaders with more freedom than the programmer currently provides. However, he acknowledged that it is difficult to:

“try to change the mindset of these people, who were used to relying upon the government to tell them what to do or to always give its approval first for any new initiatives, effectively stripping them of their leadership potential” (D4).

D7 perceived the introduction and the practice of Tatweer as giving more control to separate schools and their leaders (principals or leading teachers), but not necessarily more freedom in decision-making and initiatives. As D6 said, “giving us power to direct the school is a form of leadership, but more like 50%, and it feels like the Ministry wants to trust us with the rest 50%, but still cannot [do it].” As part of the programme, the school has already sent three separate plans of change and reform, which marks it out from non-Tatweer schools. As D4 explained, “we do not receive the plan [for organisation and staff training] from the Ministry, but rather we create it ourselves and

send it off to the Ministry for approval and for, let's call it, the final touches". This in turn, increased the motivation and engagement of all teachers as they felt that their "voices were being heard [...] and not in a superficial way" (D4)..

A key negative comment regarding Tatweer revolved around the lack of expected training. D2 and D3 remembered being involved in teacher training workshops in the past as part of the programme, but, as D3 said, "there was this expectation that there would be a structure and continuity to the training, and then at one point, they suddenly stopped". In a similar way, there had been an excellence team whose job was to re-evaluate and re-shape the work culture of the school, in line with the second stage of the programme. Another purpose of the team was to "involve all, student representatives, members of the private sector, and, of course, school leaders, in the decision-making process" (D2). However, D6 pointed out that it was "impossible to take group decisions, per the programme's guidelines, if you had no team to talk to" as there was no such excellence team in place currently, which made the programme seem inconsistent. D7 was not even aware that the training was supposed to take place, and what was its goal. When told that part of the skills that the reform sought to inculcate in individual teachers was how to become better team players, more entrepreneurial and open to change, he scoffed at the idea that "this can be taught through mere training". Instead, he claimed that the most difficult part of changing one's work style and one's leadership style is that these need to be internalised first and not simply passed down from the government or the Ministry as a new best practice.

Furthermore, many of the respondents criticised the programme for not being very useful in practice. D4, for example, mentioned that the programme has copied "Western educational models and systems", and cites the Finnish experience as a best practice that many countries around the world try to imitate. However, in general, he cautioned against such borrowing, claiming that, in other systems, freedom and creativity have been at the core of educational programs and they "are closely connected to societal expectations". In contrast, in Saudi Arabia, hierarchical structures and relations are still the norm, and this hinders the successful integration of Tatweer's "high-flown objectives" in schools. Similarly, D1 was very enthusiastic about the programme, having

read about it before joining the school, but he was not very enthusiastic about its application so far. He said:

It seems to me that the government and the schools are unable to practice what they preach. I am sure that the programme potential was recognised, but what I have seen is pieces of it scattered here and there, with no clear or coordinated plan.

D2 believed that this reform was already outdated - "not in its ideas, but in the way it is sent to us from the top" - and that it would be better if the government tried to come up with an alternative. He also proposed that it would be in the best interest of everyone if the new programme were first coordinated with all relevant stakeholders, all types of schools and with many teachers who had experience with Tatweer and were able to "comment on its weaknesses and how these could be addressed". D6 also related that it would be wonderful to teach all teachers how to become better leaders, but the application of the programme defeated its own purpose. He argued that, "Tatweer was supposed to give everyone more autonomy, but it felt like a decision in which we had no say [...] so how can we become leaders then?". Some of the other respondents (notably D1 and D5) also suggested that Tatweer is not as leadership-oriented as its creators had initially anticipated, and that perhaps it would be better if a complementary leadership strategy or reform were put in place.

Networking and Socialisation

The open communication and networking among the teaching staff were considered by the participants as very important stepping stones for leadership development. Socialisation, even in an informal setting, would sometimes provide a partial substitute for the lack of adequate training opportunities in leadership and in capacity building. Junior teachers seem to use it to exchange ideas with each other as well as to learn directly from the experiences and knowledge of senior members of the team.

D2, in particular, stressed the importance of daily and friendly communication with colleagues, which allowed him to get a sense of the educational culture at the school. He talked at some length about how it is essential for young people to feel welcome in

the school because they “feel anxious about taking the initiative and prefer to follow in their senior’s lead rather than lead themselves”. D2 also noted that he often helped “junior colleagues figure out how to deal with problems in the classroom or how to teach effectively”. According to D4, this channel of interaction might not necessarily or completely substitute for formal training and leadership development initiatives that have been put into place “at the institutional level by our predecessors”. However, networking and socialisation are perceived to produce favourable and positive long-term results among teachers as well as between the principal and his team.

Socialisation can also prove useful in facilitating inter-departmental exchange, especially for younger staff members. D1, for example, claims that interaction between seniors and juniors can be “invigorating [...] it also allows us to share among ourselves fresh and curious ideas”. However, D1 also expressed a hesitant attitude towards open dialogue in some instances. He said that he had “tried to talk to an older and more experienced colleague and I expected a constructive answer. But he did a bad job of hiding his criticism and negativity towards my attitude”. D5 and D6, the other junior participants, did not mention this issue, which might point to D1’s experience being an isolated case. D5, in turn, shared his belief in the power of “constructive dialogue and active discussion with teachers” in shaping his idea of the school environment where open and honest communication is the norm. D5 mentioned critical skills that one could develop through engaging in socialisation and networking, such as empathy, relationship-building and active listening, all of which are crucial to the development of a powerful leader in any context. Similarly, D6 relayed his own ideas about how important the institutional context and culture are to shaping leaders and enhancing the leadership qualities of incumbent leaders. “If you live in constant fear of your elders or their judgment, you’ll stay silent, and maybe meek, so you cannot become a leader” (D6).

D5 hinted at both formal and informal methods of networking with colleagues which were task and solution-oriented, and allowed him to understand the dynamics within the staff group. He suggested that “you can learn best when you observe how people work, especially with others, and how they handle problems and resolve them as a team”. In a related manner, D7 mentioned that he learnt not only from his personal experience at

work, but also by seeing how other co-workers respond to similar issues. Specifically, he narrated a situation which had called for a strong leadership style, in one of his classes, when he had been unsure what to do because he was acting as a substitute teacher for a colleague and did not have a proper sense of the class dynamics and how to best communicate with them. Then, he asked his colleagues during one of the breaks, and they “provided an example of how they had approached this class in similar cases. They [...] inspired me to be assertive when I spoke to the class [...] and it worked“. D4, the principal, also emphasised the positive and practical effects of direct two-way communication, especially for finding appropriate solutions to existing problems. He specifically encouraged communication and attempted to build his leadership capabilities by putting himself in the shoes of his colleagues and learning to identify and acknowledge his own strengths and weaknesses.

D1 also expanded upon the concept of interaction in order to highlight how important it is for school leaders to engage the wider community, along with school members, in constructive dialogue and not just limiting the scope to school leaders or even to the teacher body:

If you want to make changes to something, say, like the curriculum, or how students and teachers need to communicate or [...] work together [...] Then you need to involve everyone, and I mean, everyone. You ask students for what they want, you ask parents for their ideas, you ask the community or government or organisations for help. That’s what leaders do - they don’t make decisions on their own without listening to others, but they lead by cooperation (D1).

For many of the junior teachers, “community” was not merely an abstract term but also showed how governmental institutions, parents and relatives of the children, and partnering organisations can contribute to improving the educational process. D1 often referred to the need for “capacity-building for aspiring leaders on how they can inspire and motivate the wider community to get involved in the educational process, and that is what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders “in any environment, not just schools” as they are first and foremost team players before they become team leaders. D5 also believed that having an open-minded and wide perspective on how interaction is vital to

leadership is helpful to both leaders and those working for them. It is especially important that any “school culture be open and transparent and [...] helping us cooperate as equals and feel that we are valued - this is the job of the leader” (D1).

In relation to the above point, the Tatweer programme also allows for Tatweer school leaders and staff to get together in a shared space for collaboration and for the exchange of fresh ideas. D4 possessed perhaps the largest exposure to this concept and practice as he had led a few groups for such discussions, but he also cautioned that at the beginning, “the proceedings were quite chaotic, and we didn’t really know what we were doing”. This year, some of the newly recruited and younger teachers also got the chance to participate in online panel conferences and discussions with a select few other schools, but they mentioned (D1 and D5) specifically that they had expected to be given more time and voice in these events. D5 also claimed that “it felt as if the old atmosphere - of power and hierarchy - was stifling some of us down, and we didn’t speak up as much as we wanted to”. D7 had also taken part in more than one of these discussions, and he praised the useful exchange of knowledge, best practices and ideas for the future, but he also felt that sometimes these were “too formal or maybe too theoretical, I’m not sure, and they sounded good but didn’t really help us much when we had to plan our own internal changes”.

However, networking and socialisation have their limits in promoting learning and development, mostly due to the hierarchical organisation and work cultures in Saudi societies. Referring to the wider societal aspect and culture in the country, the respondents evoked different perspectives and feelings. In particular, the junior teachers seemed eager and idealistic about new modernisation ideas, but they were also somewhat afraid of challenging their senior leaders and colleagues because of the prevalent conservatism. D1 had already related the experience of feeling implicitly judged by elder teachers, and he also did not believe very much in “how flexible we can be in changing how we think about our work and how we do, and what leadership means for everyone”. D5 also talked about how difficult it can be to oppose your superiors, especially if they make it seem that “every criticism will be accepted as a personal attack and not as a valid argument”, but he also mentioned that he had not felt

this way at the current school. Instead, he argued that the school atmosphere is such that everyone is able to question the decisions or actions of their superiors in a positive, respectful and meaningful way, not as a “form of senseless rebellion”. In other words, being assertive and, at the same time, displaying empathy towards superiors was an inevitable and important experience for anyone who wants to lead in the understanding of D5 and D6.

In contrast, some of the senior teachers often talked about the “distribution of power” and “hierarchy”. For instance, D3 neatly categorised that his feedback to junior colleagues was focused on the “distribution of tasks and assigning roles”, upon “delegation of powers”, and upon helping them to “establish their authority in the classroom”. D7 also seemed to be leaning towards similar views as he talked at great length about the need for leadership-level interaction to take place on a regular basis rather than in one-off training programmes or special occasions. However, he did not touch upon the subject of how important networking is between different levels of the hierarchy in order to create a consolidated and open school culture, as some of the younger respondents seemed to imply. Instead, he discussed how it is “always important for any institution to have a known way of handing down power and preparing new leaders with the skills and knowledge of those whose shoes they’re trying to fill” without minimising the importance of socialisation for promoting leadership behaviours and best practices.

Also, the older group discussed the somewhat fragmentary nature of the external mentoring programmes under the Tatweer framework, as well as the school-university partnerships which were also supposed to take place under that same framework. Yet, D3 claimed that the partnerships, which would have been “a wonderful opportunity to socialise and make constructive dialogue [...] connections”, were never initiated. D4 also expressed a tepid attitude towards that segment of the mentoring programme, which was supposed to allow all teachers, junior and senior, as well as mentors, to mingle and network. He claimed that it felt “stifled and formal, and I don’t believe that it really achieved the aim as the teachers treated the mentors as superiors and were afraid to ask questions”.

Barriers to Leadership Development

The participants identified several issues that prevented school leaders from fully actualising or developing their potential, both generally and specifically at school D. Most respondents emphasised the often authoritarian style of management at schools and the Ministry of Education. Adversarial managerial styles would often lead to teachers becoming fearful of criticism and of voicing their own opinions, as D1 claimed that “some people are not even aware how authoritarian they are.” D2 mentioned that investing too much power in senior positions, be they principal or lead teacher, would result in “direct abuse of that power to further one’s own gains and to the detriment of fellow team members”. D5 noted that many authoritarian senior figures are reluctant to “admit problems and mistakes they make, and therefore lack solutions” and often place the blame upon subordinates rather than upon their own actions, which produces a severe demoralising effect on all involved. D7 compared his current experience as a lead teacher with his own journey of rising through the ranks at previous schools in this way:

“I have seen good leaders and I have seen leaders that are not fit to lead even themselves. The difference doesn’t come only from empathy, as many analysts would have us believe. There’s also a fundamental difference which has to do with self-knowledge. If you think that you’re the perfect leader, chances are you’re not, and your colleagues don’t really like you. If you realise that you can always improve, self-develop, if you will, then that’s a good sign” (D7).

The practice of favouritism was also raised by D1 and D2 as they noted instances where competencies and skills were not taken into consideration for the selection of leadership figures at this school. D2 also denigrated the practice of not penalising teachers that were “derelict in their duty”, which would inevitably create an atmosphere of non-accountability and reduced transparency. D5 remarked that such instances, which many of his colleagues had also heard of or witnessed directly, decrease the legitimacy of educational institutions and their leaders and, furthermore, decrease mutual trust among co-workers. The direct result of such problems was the creation of an indubitably “inhospitable work environment” (D4) that would not serve the leader, as

his colleagues would most likely decide to leave the institution altogether. D4 was concerned that his school lacked a sufficient number of senior teachers with some good candidates leaving the educational system ahead of time. He also inadvertently admitted that the “school atmosphere, or, maybe we can call it the environment, can make senior teachers feel that they are not appreciated enough and that the school doesn’t care about their future development as they are already experienced”.

Participants again raised the issue of school leaders neglecting the ultimate goal of their position for the sake of personal gains or prestige, which was not so much an issue in the current school but they had witnessed at previous institutions and in different roles. D2 cited the “lack of any desire for self-development”, which discredited the concept of leadership as many individuals sought after it for the sole purpose of gaining a higher “social status symbol” rather than for the betterment of themselves, their students or the school. D5 described this process as “prioritising personal consideration at the expense of work”. D7 was extremely critical of this as he had seen it multiple times before and affirmed that “leaders” like that were neither proper leaders nor actual teachers, but he added that this did not apply to school D. Related to this, D1 was opposed to the practice of appointing leaders who had little practical teacher experience as they were viewed with discontent by their subordinates, and they also failed to provide “any meaningful value to the school or even to themselves”. Although D1 cautioned that he had not seen an example “of this happening at the school [school D], that doesn’t mean that there aren’t such people here as well”.

The lack of clear understanding of the role of a leader, coupled with the lack of autonomy and creativity, have created a tedious, bureaucratic burden for school leaders, according to many of the interviewees. D3 considers the “supervision by the Ministry of Education” to be accountable for transforming the teaching and leadership process into a “bureaucratic” one without “sight of the mission and spirit of the process”, whereas D6 deplored the lack of a constructive dialogue platform between the Ministry and school leaders. D2 referred to such administrative tasks as “useless formalities”, while D7 acknowledged that they were demotivating, especially for younger teachers who had just started on the path of self-development as future leaders. D3 defined the

problem as turning the process of education and leadership into nothing more than “a routine and uncreative process, with total disregard for its mission and spirit”, which relegated teachers to the role of instructors or “robots”. Although the majority of these comments were not targeted at school D, some of the participants (most notably D3 and D6) expressed their concern that it would be difficult to maintain a unique and isolated culture at the school due to the Ministry’s interventions.

The respondents also paid considerable attention to the high and constant levels of stress and work overload that teachers taking on the role of leaders have to accept at school D, although this was not seen as specific to the current school only. D4 listed the pressure points for teacher leaders, including unruly classrooms, tight schedules, and excessive paperwork, and stressed that a leadership role often added more negative aspects than positive ones. D7’s views were also aligned with the latter point, which he termed counter-productive to the leadership process and one that turned leaders into mere “paper-pushers”. Combining this stress with what D3 called “lack of empowerment or inadequacy of the incentives” makes teachers hesitant to alter their role from teachers to leaders as they have to deal with increased pressure but have few benefits from it:

“The Ministry - and even many, many schools - are so out of touch with how we think and why we think this way. Actually, I believe that they don’t understand the role of teachers as much as they misunderstand the role of leaders. And the bad news is that they’re supposed to set examples for us as leaders [...] in their own right” (D2).

Other more minor factors relevant to school D were also cited, including the lack of financial support for “a high-quality professional development programme” or increased monthly bonuses for leaders and deputy leaders (D2), the imperfect methods of selecting school leaders through proper incentives (D6), the frequent and confusing alterations to regulations, rules, power and roles of school principals (D1), and the continuous shuffling of priorities by the management or by educational institutions (D7).

Coping Strategies for Overcoming Such Challenges

The respondents were questioned about the best practices or solutions that they would like to see implemented at the school for improving and enhancing current opportunities for leadership development. The focus was again placed upon self-development and development opportunities for school leaders, and it was notable that the senior members of the group presented more practical and actionable solutions regarding their suggestions, while the younger interviewees offered vaguer but more idealistic propositions.

Among the senior teachers, D2 listed a few potential changes, namely, selecting school leaders based on well-defined competence criteria. This reasoning was also in line with the ideas of D1, D4 and D6, who all spoke against the practice of favouritism that affected the prestige of school leadership programmes. D3 offered an interesting practical suggestion - that "a test be administered to each potential school leader to gauge his motivation and hence the appropriate incentive [for that teacher]". D7 emphasised the lack of a standardised and transparent selection mechanism which could be aligned with the expectations and perspectives of those participating in leadership programmes. Participant D1 was also worried that the close proximity of the teachers in the school, although beneficial for encouraging better networking and communication, is encouraging favouritism and was hesitant to provide a solution, fearing that information about the leadership selection process is going to leak out, negating all efforts for a more meaningful and meritocratic process for leadership selection.

D2 also mentioned the need for providing teachers and leaders with "more rewarding financial incentives [...] an SR 800 monthly bonus for school leaders and SR 500 for deputy school leaders are certainly not enough". The other senior teachers did not dwell on the financial aspect but instead discussed the need for empowerment and freedom for teachers as the best incentive for them to transition to a leadership role (D3) or that creative leaders need to be incentivised the most due to their potential contributions to the process of driving innovation (D4).

D2 recommended the creation of “effective professional development programmes such as Khebrat”, which assigns mentors to Saudi teachers who are sent abroad to learn about best academic and professional practices and implement these back at home. Similarly, D3 considered the idea of implementing development programmes that teach values as well as skills and that allow teachers to “acquire the leadership spirit and appreciate that the education process is a mission rather than a livelihood”. D4 also mentioned the gap in “providing high-quality training programmes that serve the field of education”, but he also presented the caveat that such programmes need to be appropriately timed to the shifting dynamics in national and educational contexts. D6 was also in favour of leadership training being provided by specialists who possess “both professional and academic experience and perspectives”.

D2 also stressed the need for “investing school principals with powers”, which would provide them with sufficient but reasonable autonomy from the Ministry of Education to tailor leadership and other development programmes to the specific needs of their schools. Alternatively, D3 reviewed a more drastic initiative whereby “the education process be assigned to the non-profit sector to achieve the desired objectives”. D4 mentioned the private sector in his answer, but he leaned towards a middle-ground solution and suggested that the educational sector “learn and take best practices from the market economy or from the NGO sector”. D7 pronounced himself in favour of a more structured process of handling down power, which could “reveal where more autonomy is needed and for what purposes”. Despite offering different views, these responses point to the shared realisation of the importance of expanding the available opportunities and solutions for leadership development and the realisation that the current top-down practices are obsolete and insufficient.

The younger group talked briefly about values and principles that are inherently tied to leadership and suggested more general propositions. For example, D5 remarked about “promoting mutual trust [...] extending all kinds of support [to teachers]”. D6 also claimed that it would be best if school leaders were empowered and motivated both by principals and by the Ministry, which would “bridge the current gap between the institutions and teachers if the Ministry listens to our input about the challenges that we face”. According

to D1, “school leaders must move up through the ranks [...], work first as assistants, then deputies and finally as school leaders”, which would be useful for instilling the values and cultures of the school in their mindset.

D6 also focused more on the “experience gained after I took over as a school leader” compared to the interactive aspect of his work and on developing his leadership style further through formal (training, seminars) or informal (daily interaction, casual networking) channels of communication. He had initially come to the school with “some biases, we may call them, about how work is done or should be done, but then I realised that having rigid ideas would not help me, and I had to adapt and learn how to become a leader in this very specific environment”. D7 reinforced this point as he portrayed the school culture and environment on a very positive note since they supported and encouraged constant personal development and growth for individuals. He also compared his experience with several of his previous schools, which were more oriented towards “allowing senior teachers to reaffirm their positions of power instead of allowing younglings to move up the ranks”. D1 mentioned the importance of understanding a leadership role through practice, supplemented with constant and open communication with various stakeholders: “Every one of us who has an interest in the education of these kids [...] and the progress of this school - so principals, teachers, students, parents, society, and, of course, the government”.

Overview

The experience of the teachers at school D was illuminating as their school is part of the Tatweer programme’s “smart schools” scope. The interview data reveal that school D had diverse opportunities for formalised training and was able to establish a culture that nurtures a drive for self-development and for realising the leadership potential of every teacher through more informal means such as socialisation and networking. Some of the participants were dissatisfied with the current official training programmes and did not consider them flexible or adaptable enough to fit their requirements and their school culture. Both senior and junior teachers in school D were convinced of the need to be constantly on the path to self-development as leaders, but some believed that this

aspect was more important than formal programmes, while others considered both as equally necessary and complementary.

Overall, the participants from school D were positive about the contribution that the Tatweer programme had in supporting the development of their leadership potential. They noted that the programme had ambitious and idealistic objectives and scope but were not as convinced about its practical results and influence. Many suggested improving the programme to fit modern times and requirements. Networking was considered by the participants as a major aspect of exchanging ideas and best practices and allowing teachers and school leaders to learn from each other how to solve practical problems, how to deal with emerging problems in the classroom, and how to become better leaders. The major hindrances to improving leadership qualities include the lack of honest motivation in those attending leadership training, the lack of freedom, the focus on administrative work rather than on creativity and innovation, as well as the continuous and elevated levels of stress and responsibilities for teacher leaders. The propositions for addressing and solving these issues were diverse, with the senior teachers presenting more practical options while their junior counterparts emphasised more upon values that the school should promote to improve the overall working environment in school D. Overall, there is no straightforward or single solution that would tackle all of the gaps and lacks, but incentivising and motivating leaders, providing them with autonomy, listening to their input, and the creation of well-tailored professional development programmes, were all cited as steps in the right direction.

The next chapter presents the findings from the interviews with policy-makers.

Chapter Eight: Findings: Policymakers' Perspectives

Introduction

The chapter presents the findings of the interviews carried out with Saudi policy-makers (specifically, deputy directors and assistant directors in the Ministry of Education) as well as training managers from the educational centres who possess knowledge and experience of educational policies and training for principals and teachers. The training managers (TM 1 and TM 2) were recruited from a local training centre that has collaborated with three of the case-study schools, A, B and C. TM 1 and TM 2 are not directly involved with the training of teaching professionals but they do have rich insights into the process of creating, tailoring and adapting programmes aimed at improving the capabilities (including leadership potential) of Saudi educators. Both participants were selected based on their qualifications and relevant experience as trainers.

The policy-maker group included two additional categories of professionals - three deputy directors (D1, D2 and D3) and two assistant directors (A1 and A2). The researcher decided to interview deputies who would bring practical insights to the research as they were directly involved in the design and implementation of the leadership development programmes. The assistant directors were also interviewed to uncover the views of those implementing a policy or strategy. Both the deputies and assistants were purposively sampled from the Secondary School Directorate located in the Saudi province of Najran.

As with the school-based research, the interviews were held exclusively in Arabic as the researcher hoped that this choice of language would facilitate discussion, and allow for the conduct of a smooth conversation.

The interview guide and questions utilised for these interviews were tailored to this specific audience. As a consequence, the analysis produced a different set of themes from the ones used in the previous chapters. These major themes are:

- Current school development programmes
- Selection criteria for participants
- The Tatweer Programme

- Barriers to school leadership development programmes
- Suggestions for enhancing current policies & programmes
- Socialisation & networking

Table 8.1: Participating policymakers and Training manager

Code [interview]	Code [research]	Position
P29	DD1	Deputy Director
P30	DD2	Deputy Director
P31	DD3	Deputy Director
P32	AD1	Assistant Director
P33	AD2	Assistant Director
P34	TM1	Training Manager
P35	TM2	Training Manager

Current School Development Programmes

The first theme relates to the current state of leadership development programmes in Saudi schools and serves to provide context for the other themes that follow. It appears that most teacher training programmes across the country (including those that were focused upon promoting the leadership capacities of the participants) follow a decentralised model, as the Ministry sets guidelines and then leaves it to the individual schools and regional inspectorates to implement these in practice. However, it can be argued that the leadership development programmes were well integrated into the overall framework of the Ministry's plans for teachers' development, with participants acknowledging that leadership is a subject that is "regularly featured in the seminars delivered by the ministry" (DD1). Further, AD1 recognised that teachers' training in Saudi Arabia has traditionally neglected the subject of leadership as the training programmes emphasised practical issues rather than soft skills. However, AD1 also mentioned that a genuine change is happening in Saudi programmes for teacher education with a greater focus on promoting leadership in the past few years. Despite

this, according to participant TM1, there is a lot that could be desired from the content of the existent leadership development programmes, as the current leadership seminars are mostly focused on explaining the concept of leadership to participants rather than providing adequate support on how leadership can be effectively practised in the school. Participant TM 1 also observed that the leadership development materials have placed undue emphasis on the transformational and transactional models of leadership, and tend to ignore the other leadership models that might also work in the classroom and school. Participant TM1 proposed a more centralised approach for the delivery of leadership courses, arguing that the Ministry should have a leading role in approving the content of the leadership development programmes instead of designating this responsibility to the regional inspectorates.

The decentralised nature of the leadership development programmes has brought about two notable consequences. First, the participants observed significant variation in the content of leadership courses, as regional inspectorates had the authority to approve the course content (AD2). As a result, the leadership programmes that were gaining traction in some parts of the country were quite different from those delivered in other parts of the country. For DD3, however, that divergence was not a problem that the Ministry should resolve, as it enabled a proliferation of opportunities for personal development as “interested teachers can attend a course in the other parts of the country if they think that this course will add something that is missing from the local training opportunities” However, the divergence in the content of the school leadership programmes increased the administrative workload of the Ministry (DD1).

DD1 mentioned the regularity of induction meetings to acquaint schools with the most recent changes and updates in the field. Specifically, he talked about the Ministerial guidelines and developments, which needed to be communicated to school leaders, directors and teachers alike on time and in an understandable way. The Ministry was also tasked with the role of promoting the available opportunities for leadership development to the schools, as the regional inspectorates that had the primary responsibility for the development of those programmes lacked the expected outreach. The decentralisation of the school development programme also brought to light the

challenges of ensuring that leadership development programmes around the country are achieving their purpose. AD2, for example, mentioned that schools were very adept at creating their own S.M.A.R.T. objectives and that many schools have tried to introduce measurable criteria to help them both in estimating the progress that individual teachers have made in developing their own leadership potential and in evaluating the progress that the school itself has made in adopting the Ministerial guidelines and recommendations for promoting leadership behaviours in the school. However, he also argued that it would be preferable if there was a uniform measurement system that could be used to assess where the leadership development programmes are falling short and identify potential areas for programme improvements.

DD3 was much more expansive about the current initiatives organised by the Ministry as he enthusiastically described the creation of a leadership committee whose job it is to “evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of school principals and vice principals”. The committee is targeted at schools and seeks to identify those principals and teachers “whose performance didn’t meet the Ministry’s standards” and to ensure that those people were directed towards those courses that could further strengthen their leadership potential. TM1 also considered that supporting principals in developing and strengthening their leadership potential is the most practical and visible output of the committee’s work as it showed that the Ministry is committed to promoting good practice and singling out those whose leadership skills are not adequately demonstrated. DD3 also mentioned the role of the school management supervisor, who helps in the creation of plans and objectives for personal development programmes in the school (some of which touched upon the topic of leadership) and the continuous communication with regional offices of the Ministry, which helped some schools to find their own approach to leadership development.

However, AD1 hinted at the possible gap between expectations and reality, as the regular meetings between the school and the Ministry failed to identify the root causes of the structural problems in the educational system, which negatively impact the prospect of encouraging the personnel to engage more proactively in their leadership development.

“I think the committee does not realise that the main problem for schools at the moment is retaining quality people. The teacher’s job is too demanding and people who possess the right set of skills can find employment elsewhere. We need to create a way to motivate teachers to become better and reward them for their commitment so that they can stay in the educational sector in the long term”.

The participant mentioned low or unequal pay, lack of incentives, and bureaucratic obstacles as issues that teachers have raised as hampering their work and professional development that the Ministry and Committees have not been able to address. In general, it appears that the interviewees discussed the committee work as one of the more visible and practical aspects of the Ministry's programmes for identifying and prioritising leadership development at schools, even though there was no consensus on the specific contribution that the committee has in supporting teachers’ professional development practice.

When the participants were asked to elaborate on what programmes could improve school leadership potential and capabilities, DD2 said that he likes exchange visits that could be either local or international. He added that exchange programmes help teachers to become more assertive and gain “knowledge and skills outside their comfort zone, and this helps them grow personally and professionally”. The participant also recognised that leadership is practiced differently in different contexts, and that exchange visits are showing new methodologies for leading in the classroom that will be taken across the different schools.

AD1, who had previously participated in an international exchange programme, praised its flexibility and freedom. He noted that his colleagues not only demonstrated effective school leadership but also highlighted the importance of leaders seeking support from the school when facing classroom challenges. As the participant mentioned, “We need to improve the communication and collaboration between individual schools and provide role models to the new teachers”. DD3 shed light on the regional exchange programmes, which are based on a principle of rotation, especially during the free months of the summer vacation. These rotation programmes helped “teachers view

and understand other contexts apart from the one in which they work”, which in turn proved useful for increasing their “empathy and cooperation with other teachers (DD3). Those skills are critical for leadership development, as individuals learn about the needs of others and how they can help in addressing those needs, and in effect, help them in practising emphatic leadership, which requires understanding the needs and opinions of the other stakeholders engaged in the educational process.

However, DD3 also said that these exchange programmes were often focused on promoting anecdotal evidence with “teachers telling about their own personal experience”. Nevertheless, such an approach has provided useful opportunities as school principals learn from other schools, for example, with respect to “solving problems related to school buildings”. DD3, however, argued that the training could benefit from having a more rigid schedule, which could encourage not only the exchange of experience but also promote skills such as critical thinking, active listening and communication. He argued that it would be far better if the leadership exchange programmes that the Ministry organises undertake rigid, data-driven and specific evaluation criteria for what constitutes good leadership. He referred to similar frameworks that had already been discussed, such as the Marzano School Leadership Evaluation Model, which emphasises “continuous development, creating a community and distributing resources”, and considered that more focused leadership programmes would help Saudi schools. However, AD2 mentioned that the training and evaluation programmes that originate in the West were often cited as inspirational examples, but he did not recommend relying solely on them due to their abstract nature and the challenges of adapting them to the Saudi environment.

Similarly, TM1 mentioned instituting similar exchange programmes for trainers and training managers, such as himself, which would be helpful in establishing “best practices, what works and what doesn’t [...] and it is difficult to learn how to lead in our profession when you have to be the one teaching other leaders”. He gave the example of a new pilot programme which was under discussion, and which could provide a more formal and structured training framework for the trainers themselves. TM2 was also in agreement about the need to “train the trainer” and that “trainers need to be leaders as

well in order to teach leadership properly”. DD1 added that “this new pilot programme was actually developed by one of the schools - it was not created by us at the Ministry, which is a good sign in the right direction”. He mentioned that the programme was inspired by Western practices where think tanks or NGOs would come up with initiatives like this one.

DD1 and DD2 added more details about available courses for leadership development, which included promoting new technologies, introducing creative thinking and innovation, and promoting STEM-based teaching. Additional courses were developed to improve teachers’ mediation, facilitation and mentoring skills, which DD1 considers to be the most crucial for any teacher, no matter their current learning needs, teaching area and future professional ambitions. According to DD2, the Ministry has developed a combination of hard skills and soft skills courses that can offer a “novel” and “comprehensive” learning experience for any teacher. AD1 further mentioned that the Ministry has moved away from promoting courses that improve the teachers’ competencies in specific subjects (such as math and sciences) and is moving forward to a new understanding of practical and necessary skills such as “empathy” and “emotional intelligence”, along with “reflective thinking”, and having a “strategic vision or direction”, become the focus of the new training initiatives, which helped in creating an extensive programme for leadership development.

DD3 focused on the strategies for improving training and its effectiveness, including assigning schools to supervisors of the school management department, arranging technical visits of supervisors, and holding regular meetings and workshops where principals and vice principals, as well as other school leaders, could easily and “without fear air out their own views about the training programmes and reforms”. AD1 also expounded upon the practice of holding workshops, which were sometimes organised internally by schools or in conjunction with the Ministry. He also commended that the workshops often featured notable guest speakers from Saudi Arabia or from abroad. These, “brought extremely useful knowledge, ideas and simple inspiration to the attendees and [...] it showed them the way to growth”. DD1 also praised the workshops

which bring together junior and senior teachers and allow them to bridge this gap in communication among the generations.

The interviews with the participants demonstrated growing recognition among policy-makers for more programmes that target developing leadership skills for teachers. They also revealed that the current framework for developing leadership potential is overly decentralised, with the regional inspectorate and schools taking the lead in developing their own programmes for professional and leadership development. However, the Ministry, in collaboration with the regional inspectorates, are working to develop numerous soft skill initiatives to enhance leadership capabilities, while the leadership committee is proactively targeting those who fail to demonstrate leadership potential and introducing them to new opportunities for skill development. Exchange programmes were also used as a tool that could facilitate collaboration, networking and exchange of ideas. Although the participants were positive that such initiatives are suitable for disseminating best practices and for offering solutions for complex problems in classroom settings, many of those exchange events lacked validated methodology on how leadership skills could be promoted. The overly positive attitude of policy-makers to the content and output of the current initiative is not surprising as those involved in the Ministry might be biased and less critical of their own initiatives.

Selection Criteria for Participants

The selection criteria for participants in the various leadership programmes was the second issue that was discussed in the interviews with policy-makers. The Tatweer programme was also included in this discussion as the participants reflected on how the programme was implemented and how the participants and schools were selected (see next section). This issue is important for the research as the previous chapters have shown that some teachers believe that the selection for schools (and, respectively, teachers) to participate in professional development has not been done with sufficient clarity, with some believing that the selection was marred by bias and nepotism. The policy-makers interviewed for this work disagreed that there was anything wrong with the way the participants were selected. They emphasised that merit, current needs, and practical necessities were the key factors that impacted the selection process.

AD1 and DD2 mentioned that previous experience and length of tenure are the most important factors that are considered by the selection committee when determining participants for the existent leadership training. However, DD1 mentioned that there is a subjective element that was influencing the selection process as participants were chosen not solely because of their tenure. The “progress the individual has achieved through the various stages of the education field - from junior teacher to principal” (DD1) was also taken into account. This means priority was given to those candidates who are promoted more regularly as, according to the participant, a speedy promotion was an indicator that the individual has the leadership and managerial skills necessary to advance their careers. In addition, the needs of the applicants were also taken into account, as TM2 claimed that a key prerogative of the Ministry was to avoid overtraining or a situation in which the same people were selected to participate in the different programmes.

The participants admitted that the selection criteria for the leadership courses varied from course to course as there were some initiatives that were designed for those striving to become leaders and more advanced ones for those who already have experience in leading successfully. For the first initiatives, the formal academic qualifications of the aspiring leaders were taken into account, and emphasis was put on participants’ resumes (AD2). DD1 added that the selection committee looks not only at the overall experience of the candidate but takes into account “professional performance over the last two years specifically”. D2 argued that the committee considers the additional courses that the candidate has taken but added that “is not as important, it is more of a nice-to-have”. TM1 mentioned, however, that a candidate who has participated in numerous training events organised by the Ministry might not be chosen to participate in the courses for aspiring leaders in order that “we do not over-train people who have had a lot of opportunities”. AD2 also mentioned that the trainees are deliberately selected to avoid a situation in which “we are focusing on the same cohort of participants year after year”. The contrary would be counterproductive as there is a limit to what the training programmes can provide to participants, and there exists a point, as TM2 also attested, that “we want the teachers to focus on doing rather than merely on attending training”.

For some participants, the selection criteria for participating in training programmes provided by the Ministry were specific, measurable and objective, with priority being given to those candidates who have the necessary qualifications and have not participated in similar training before. DD3, however, considers that there is a subjective element in the selection process, arguing that some people “were selected on the basis of pure intuition”. He specifically mentioned that participants for leadership courses were chosen subjectively, and preference was given to those who show the “ability to take the initiative”, which for the participant could be deduced from the way the motivation letter of the candidate has been written. When the participant was asked whether the candidates perceived such subjective criteria as appropriate, he argued that “we are not trying to exclude anyone. We just think that we cannot select people just by looking at their CVs and formal qualifications. Everyone needs help and support, and young people will definitely feel neglected if we do not judge their capacities subjectively.”

Willingness to learn and put into practice what was learned should be taken into account when interviewing potential candidates, even if this might seem somewhat subjective [TM1]. The existence of subjective elements in participant selection should not be taken as evidence of bias and nepotism; even those interviewees who were mildly dissatisfied with the selection component of the current programmes denied that biased practices influence election results. For TM2, there is no favouritism in the selection process because “those who participate do not receive any personal benefits. They get their certificate, and this is it. Their salary does not depend on how many and what courses they take. Their promotion also does not depend on the courses that they have taken. It is for them only”.

However, the participants did not reflect in detail on why some teachers perceive that the selection process for the leadership programmes is flawed. AD2 argued that the main reason for such perceptions is that the selection criteria are not always explained to the participants. DD3, in turn, suggested that there is a subjective element in any selection process and that those who are turned away will always perceive that the selection process was not done properly. None of the participants believed that the tough selection process was turning some participants away, especially as TM2

mentioned that he struggled to fill the open spots for the last training he had conducted. However, TM1 expressed concern that some of the people whom he had trained showed little interest in the training and were enrolled in a leadership course “only to get their certificate”, which means that the current methodology for selecting participants for leadership development is not capable of identifying those who would benefit most from further training.

Even though the policy-makers have attempted to present the selection process for the leadership courses as unbiased, made after the consideration of objective criteria, one can easily spot inconsistencies in the participants’ responses. While the researcher agrees that every selection process has an element of subjectivity, the participants have attempted to justify the existence of broad and vague criteria that determine the outcomes of the selection process. While need and merit seem to be the guideline indicators (according to the participants) for the selection process, these are not properly defined with respect to leadership development courses. The findings suggest that the ambiguous selection criteria could be attributed to the decentralised nature of the leadership training and the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the design and operation of the leadership training. The inability of the Ministry to define and demonstrate the selection criteria as fair and objective could explain the scepticism that school participants voiced in relation to their access to leadership development programmes.

The Tatweer Programme

Concerns that participant selection is not sound were also expressed about the selection process for schools and teachers that took part in the Tatweer programme. Examining the objective component of the selection criteria, DD2 spoke about the professional evaluation score that a candidate obtains before they are invited to participate in the teachers’ learning and development programme that is part of Tatweer. This score is obtained following an evaluation by a committee of elected officials and trainers and “captures academic knowledge, mediation skills, planning and conflict-resolution skills” to ensure that the candidates with the highest scores are selected to participate.

Yet, as TM2 mentioned, “Unfortunately, the score scale is not very robust and has not been updated in a long time [...], and as such, I don’t consider it very up-to-date”. DD3 voiced his concern that the right standards are not chosen in selecting participants for Tatweer:

“I think that we made a mistake in providing financial incentives to schools that take part in the Tatweer programme. I do think that most schools who got in really deserved to be there, and those teachers who took additional courses as a part of Tatweer were properly selected. However, I... kind of feel... that some of the participants enrolled because they wanted to bring more money to the schools rather than because they had a genuine interest in the course.

Although none of the other interviewees expressed as much dissatisfaction with the current Tatweer programme as DD3, they also noted that the selection process should be further strengthened by adopting a rigorous methodology for screening the candidates. DD2, AD1 and TM2 were eager to work with a more efficient methodology and plan in mind but felt unsure whether the Ministry was going to accept changes. There was a perception among the people working in the Ministry - most notably DD2 and AD1 - that the current selection criteria were robust enough and could not be easily substituted with a validated methodology.

The selection criteria for the Tatweer programme have also changed over time, and the participants seemed to welcome the changes; for example, DD2 talked about the pilot launch of the initial 50 smart schools (boys’ and girls’) across the 25 provinces of the country, which were chosen to represent “an average school”, meaning that they represented the most common type of schools in terms of class sizes and curricula. The purpose of this approach, as DD1 attested, is that “the Ministry needed information on what the different schools in Saudi Arabia needed, and we thought that random selection is the best way we can get this information”.

While the purpose of the selection of the first “smart school” participants under the Tatweer framework was to obtain data about the teachers’ professional development needs, according to AD2, this objective was not attained. “The schools were not informed about the programme in detail. Some teachers were not honest about their

needs because they thought that they were putting the school in a bad light". According to AD2, supported by DD1, DD3 and TM2, the unintended consequence of making Tatweer an exclusive programme was that, instead of encouraging "increased responsibility, accountability and freedom in schools" (AD2), the programme encouraged principals to hide problems within the schools so that their institution was selected. "I think that the schools who participated in the first phase were not aware of what they needed to do to participate in the many programmes for career growth and development that we offered" (DD3). For TM2, the reason for the lack of interest in the career development path of Tatweer was that some principals believed that "it is better to use Tatweer money to improve the technology infrastructure at the schools" rather than to invest in leadership development, adding that one of the successes of the revised Tatweer programme is to separate the resources that could be allotted for technological improvements from those allocated to teacher training and development. This links to the observation (above) that the Ministry struggles to advertise the leadership development programmes in an appropriate manner and to encourage the interest of the people that those programmes target.

School participants (see previous chapters) voiced a number of concerns about the selection process for the Tatweer programme, which included accusations of nepotism, lack of explanations on why specific schools were or were not selected, and lack of clarity about the specific opportunities for leadership development that the programmes provide. TM1 and TM2 admitted that their interest in the leadership development courses offered under the Tatweer programme was initially low because the programme beneficiaries were mostly interested in the opportunities that the programme provided for technological upgrades. For TM2, this lack of interest was a missed opportunity as the Ministry struggled to meet its targets for teacher training in the first 5 years of the programme.

However, none of the policy-makers admitted that there was something wrong with the selection process for the schools, even though there was a wider recognition that the rejection of one school was deterring the school from applying for the programme again. Indeed, the main reason reported for the rejections was the lack of resources and

capability to expand the programme outreach. However, DD2 argued that many teachers are not applying for the available programmes for leadership development under Tatweer because they are generally unaware of those opportunities. The lack of interest in leadership development skews the selection process, as the Ministry needs to fill their quotas for participation. There is also a perception among teachers, according to DD1, that technological upgrades and teacher development initiatives under the Tatweer programme have the same budget, which resulted in principals often preferring to utilise the opportunities for technological innovation rather than those for leadership development. Such comments corroborate the findings from the previous chapters that not enough attention has been directed towards popularising the leadership development component of the Tatweer programme for individual schools and teachers, which impacted not only the quality of the candidates selected for those programmes but also reduced the effectiveness of the course as fewer participants were enrolled than was originally planned.

Barriers to School Leadership Development

A common theme that emerged during the interviews with policy-makers relates to the barriers to school leadership development. The policy-makers and training managers were more focused on the technical aspects of delivering school leadership development programmes rather than on the specific needs of the participants.

DD1 and DD3 mentioned the work of the recently created Saudi Education and Training Evaluation Commission, which was officially founded in 2017. The Commission is geared towards accreditation of education and training, and one of its responsibilities is to issue “school leadership licences to school leadership supervisors, principals and vice principals, based upon the successful completion of tests” (DD1). DD3 said that:

The Commission does conduct evaluation tests for all classes and grades, but the problem is that, in the absence of any feedback, actual deficiencies [...] will not be addressed and we will only get to hear numbers and statistics that are not beneficial.

DD1 claims that the commission was established much later than needed and that it would have helped with the introduction of the Tatweer programme. DD2 adds that the Ministry follows a piecemeal approach when it comes to training and accreditation of teachers and argues that such an approach is preventing the Ministry from preparing a structured programme for teachers' development.

AD2 added that the system is often guided by "long-term objectives... for which we, however, make short-term plans or partial plans only". AD2 acknowledged that the problem most likely lies with the difficulty of overhauling the entire system all at once and that "even when they are over-ambitious, they might still miss the mark".

Most participants mentioned that the implementation of training programmes was sometimes not linked to advancements in other educational areas. Yet, as DD3 noted, "curricula need to be developed, operational and strategic plans need to be drafted, you cannot update training policies and treat them as if they exist in a vacuum". TM2 also suggested that when any of these other areas are updated, no major changes are made to a particular part of the school development policy or its sub-programmes unless they are part of "a sustainable strategy". AD2 also claimed that until everyone realises how "inter-connected the whole system is, we will not be as efficient and effective as we could otherwise be".

The lack of a "closed feedback loop" was cited by DD3 as one of the main reasons why progress seems to be slow in some education and training arenas. Institutions like the Commission are great and needed to facilitate training, but they also need to improve [...], and someone needs to review their work and provide feedback". Additionally, AD1 talked about the lack of self-assessment of the very institutions that are dealing with training and development and advised the Commission to "either provide or undergo its own self-assessment or perhaps, and that would be more beneficial, invite objective experts to do that assessment instead". In addition, TM1 and TM2 hinted that they were not aware of the exact assessment or feedback processes put in place, which they believe to be an impediment to developing a robust programme for leadership development. As TM1 argued, "we need to receive adequate feedback from both trainers and from the participants [about the training programmes]." When prompted, he

added that, in general, “people are afraid to raise their concerns because they believe that, if they say that they are unhappy, their school will lose. We need to encourage the participants of the training programmes to be honest about their feedback to be comfortable in sharing it.”

Finally, the issue of standardisation was also mentioned by some of the participants in relation to the implementation of the programmes at the various schools. For example, DD2 mentioned that some of the programmes for leadership development seem to be very generic, and unsuitable for the needs of some schools. However, he argued that “the Ministry cannot come up with programmes for every separate school or every individual teacher”.

TM1 also agreed that some of the programmes are implemented at institutions which are at different stages of their growth. He gave the example of a school which had already piloted many training programmes, is currently a Tatweer school, and has offered a number of internal and external opportunities for teachers’ development. The identical training programme was also presented to a school that was not ready to implement it and did not have previous experience. “Basically, both had to implement the same programme, but whereas it made decent sense for the new school, it was quite redundant for the other one”. Yet, “it is worth trying to selectively adapt some programmes based upon the experience and history of the school rather than thinking of them as being all the same and at the same level” (AD2).

Suggestions for Enhancing Current Policies and Programmes

This section focuses on the suggestions made by the participants for improving the quality of leadership development policies and programmes for teachers, principals and school administration. They refrained from offering specific strategies, and some of their suggestions appear to be quite abstract and vague. DD1, for instance, talked about the creation of a strategic plan that would be introduced at the school level to promote bottom-up approaches for teachers’ development, which is the current strategy of the Saudi Ministry of Education:

The Ministry wants us to become leaders in our own right, to take the initiative, be more assertive and all that [...] but at the same time they want to approve every programme and every intervention and in effect constrain the self-development opportunities” (DD1).

DD3 agreed, claiming that promoting leadership development in schools can only be effective if the “Ministry explores the needs of the ordinary teacher and asks him or her how they want to see things done”. He specifically suggested the institution of regular and structured meeting sessions where selected individuals, teachers and the ministry discuss salient issues. AD1 also argued that the Ministry needs to consider teachers’ feedback and input for the leadership development programmes as they would otherwise “easily feel left out, and that’s exactly the opposite of what our professional development strategies should try to achieve”. DD3 was certain that progress towards developing robust programmes for school professional development cannot be accomplished unless the teachers are provided with opportunities to voice their concerns to those operating in the Ministry. DD2 expressed a similar attitude when talking about what constitutes an effective school leadership programme. There was a need not only for obtaining more feedback from the participants themselves when strengthening leadership development programmes but also for centralising the current initiatives. According to AD2, the decentralised nature of leadership development programmes is encouraging the regional inspectorate and individual schools to develop their own initiatives and helping them to expand upon their leadership capacities, and yet, the lack of centralisation means that many of the current programmes are duplicated. TM 1 was also concerned that some of the existing initiatives are being organised without sufficient planning and, as a consequence, they struggle to achieve the expected results.

In that respect, the two training managers expounded upon the inherent mismatch of the perspectives of those responsible for creating the school leadership policies and programmes and of those for whom these programmes are intended. TM1 talked about the constant need for “monitoring and feedback of these programmes and how well they are received [...] or how badly”. He mentioned that the Ministry had developed a fixed

and expansive scale for evaluating the impact of Tatweer during its various phases of implementation but that a similar approach was “sorely lacking regarding other training programmes”. DD1 also agreed that what is needed after the implementation stage is a combination of “hard data and honest feedback from the participants [...] we need to quantify the results but also to remain open to the criticism and feedback of the trainees”. DD2 referred to well-established evaluation frameworks, such as the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model, which has four dimensions - reaction, learning, behaviour and results. “The model includes pre-set questionnaires for trainees and also establishes what outcomes to look out for - this could be big things like boosted morale or smaller details like fewer staff complaints”. In addition, TM2 suggested that, for a programme to be effective, it would be best if it were first piloted at some schools to ensure that the objectives of the programme could be realised in practice. He also found that the current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework is not adequately developed as it does not encourage the participants to share their honest feedback and perspectives on the quality and effectiveness of the training they have received.

TM2 also cautioned that, despite the rigorous mechanisms for evaluation in place, the lack of open channels of communication with the participants of the programmes runs the risk of turning these programmes into nothing more than “hollow or superficial, especially if the performance of the teacher is based upon the success of the student”. AD1 also said that the current evaluation criteria are overly focused on measurable indicators, and while such indicators are necessary for ensuring that the programmes are effective, he recommended that evaluation processes should be expanded to cover important and non-quantifiable aspects of training and development, such as the growth of soft skills that a teacher might attain through such programmes.

In addition, DD3 discussed the need for involving teachers at the very early stages of drafting a policy or when deciding how best to implement it. “We are building this for them; they are our target group, and if they don’t like it, then it doesn’t really make sense to do it in the first place” (DD3). He recommended starting with small-scale practical solutions, such as holding short workshops or discussion panels with various stakeholder groups, such as school representatives and school leaders at different

levels in their professional paths. AD2 preferred to have a more robust mechanism for providing feedback. He argued that school principals and teachers should not be included only at the earlier stages of policy development. "These people should be included in all discussions before, during and especially after the programme has been implemented because they can provide the most valuable input out of all other stakeholders" (AD2).

The majority of participants also pronounced themselves in favour of updating and comparing the training content, although different propositions were advanced. Whereas it appears that the older participants favoured learning from the Arab traditions, the younger ones suggested that the best source of knowledge on how leadership development is to happen could be taken from the Western states that have much more advanced experience in promoting leadership training. Participants DD2, AD1 and TM1 were not opposed to the idea of learning from international experience, but they believed that it would be far better if the Saudi policies and programmes "originate in the Saudi soil" (AD1). However, DD2 claimed that an "effective programme is only as effective as it is suited to the minds of the people that it aims to train". He added that you cannot expect future educational leaders to blindly follow what has worked elsewhere and then realise that it is not very efficient locally. In this respect, DD2 added that it is important to have formalised documentation about best practices and a clearly structured work organisation, which can be followed so that you can "instil the right skills in these upcoming leaders". TM1 leaned towards a middle approach that would still try and implement Western best practices " , but only if we adapt them to our needs; otherwise, they will not be effective" (TM1).

The other group of interviewees appeared to approve of Westernising parts of the Saudi training programmes for professional development. AD2 and TM2 mentioned that the Tatweer programme was modelled after the very successful Finnish educational model, which has produced "proven results" (AD2) and a "high success rate for students and, respectively, teachers" (TM2). However, DD1 and DD3, for instance, mentioned that this does not necessarily imply that the same programme, if copied directly, would produce the same results in another country, especially one like Saudi Arabia, with a different

historical, socio-cultural and even religious background. As DD3 claimed, “It would be much better to be inspired by the philosophy and pick some best practices but not expect that you can use the same model as the original”. Additionally, DD1 and DD3 spoke at some length concerning Western models of leadership development and mentioned that it grants more “freedom and initiative” to educators in designing these programmes. DD3 gave the example of workshops with school leadership trainers and policy-makers, where “each side was learning from the other one, and this was collaborative and interactive”. Similarly, TM2 sounded enthusiastic about implementing a more “flexible approach that the trainees themselves would really like” and that would not leave them “bored even after a dozen sessions, as some of the current courses do” (TM2).

It should be noted that the participants offered conflicting views on how leadership development programmes in KSA should be further enhanced. Some of them complained about the decentralised nature of the programmes, while others considered this to be a key strength. The participants proposed a number of initiatives, but it was unclear how those initiatives were going to resolve the structural or operational problems facing teacher and leadership development in Saudi Arabia. The lack of agreement on what practical steps are necessary to improve the current programmes evidences the general lack of monitoring and evaluation of leadership development initiatives and the inability of the Ministry to identify workable approaches to the direction of development initiatives in the future.

Socialisation and Networking

The socialisation and training of teachers was the last major theme that emerged from the discussions with policymakers. The purpose of this section is to outline their perspectives on the extent to which teacher training programmes contribute to enhanced socialisation and networking among school leaders and teachers.

DD1 praised the creation of the workshops and the implementation of the exchange programmes as the “first steps in expanding the network of trainees and allowing them to communicate and maybe even collaborate outside of their limited circle of colleagues at their own school”. The existing training arrangements were perceived by DD2 to offer

new opportunities for teachers to share ideas and best practices with others in a less formal environment. AD1 argued that the current workshops are aiming to encourage teachers to adopt a more student-focused methodology in their teaching, which could be interpreted as evidence that the training programmes have a role in facilitating the entrenchment of best practices and the organisational socialisation of those who participate in those programmes.

The training programmes were perceived as instrumental in promoting organisational socialisation, as seen in the responses of DD1, TM2 and AD2, who acknowledged that training attempts to construct a “positive role model” (AD2) that teachers could become and are useful, especially for those who are unsure whether it is worthwhile to take part in formal training programmes and courses. DD3 considered the psychological aspects of networking, as he espoused the benefits of training programmes to help participants in achieving “psychological maturity”. DD3 added that “psychological maturity” relates to developing one’s character as an individual with a set of values and principles. The view of TM2 is similar, mentioning that his primary responsibility as a trainer is to ensure that those who complete the courses are equipped with both the soft and hard skills necessary for them to address the “challenges that they face every day as teachers” and “feel that are capable of handling their responsibilities as teachers” As such, and similar to TM1’s interpretation, socialisation is not a phenomenon that is limited to networking with peers, or more experienced and senior leaders but is a targeted intervention that aims to improve the capabilities of the school to deliver high-quality education to its students. While the participants did not mention directly the different types of socialisation impacted by the leadership development programmes, their responses hint that one of the key objectives of the training programmes is enhancing the opportunities for organisational socialisation.

Another implication of training programmes for teacher socialisation was mentioned by DD1, who underlined that current training and development programmes are problem-oriented and help the participants to develop “problem-solving skills as well by helping colleagues to resolve difficulties they are facing”. He believes that such training and development programmes help teachers to become more open-minded and even to

emerge as “better collaborators” as they seek not only to better their own working conditions and themselves but also those around them. This is essential for creating a supportive work environment to ease the professional socialisation of both those aspiring to leadership positions and new entrants to the educational system.

As TM1 also attested, “some teachers come to the realisation that they can only grow professionally if the school environment in which they are is also improving”. As AD2 insisted, a school where teachers are more focused on the advancement of their own professional goals may be “sometimes to the detriment of others”, and the school environment and culture may suffer as a consequence. AD2 added that “in the long run, this will also result in negative consequences for that teacher as well because no one can function in a toxic, isolated or dysfunctional environment for long”. AD2 also mentioned that the Ministry realised the need to improve the work environment to ensure that the schools are capable of nurturing and maintaining top talent. The participants acknowledged that staff turnover in some schools is a serious issue, as “many teachers are leaving the profession because they are dissatisfied with workload and the lack of recognition for their work” (TM2) or because they are unhappy with “their pay, and the absence of promotion opportunities” (DD2), which could be taken as evidence that the toxic environment in some schools, and structural barriers, prevent some teachers from reaching adequate professional socialisation.

However, the participants also argued that the training opportunities provided to school leaders can facilitate their role and professional socialisation. DD2 was quite vocal about the psychological aspect of teacher education programmes, which helped “create lasting links and [...] might I say, alliances, between school teachers at different levels of work and coming from different institutions”. TM1 also mentioned that the exchange programmes and cross-school teaching initiatives have been beneficial in ameliorating the inherent competition that can often be found at schools or even between the members of different schools, which he does not consider to be “healthy”. He added that even networking is often used as only a “tool for improving career prospects” rather than as an “opportunity for experience sharing between peers”. In addition, AD2 expressed that bringing teachers from different schools together for regular or extended

periods of time has resulted in “improvements in communication”, which helps promote a more positive school culture.

DD1 talked at great length about the need for teachers who are more knowledgeable, empathic and better trained to handle new challenges. DD2 also argued that the existing career development programmes can help in nurturing social responsibility in participants by making them realise the wider impact that their work has on society. TM2 mentioned that the most successful training he has delivered was on how the teachers could better interact with parents and children, and he attributed this to the growing realisation of some teachers that they need to “think beyond their own institution and to forge better links with the community as a whole”. DD3 sounded more practical as he expanded upon the need to ensure that training develops “a strong character” in a school leader and helps them adopt “the principles espoused by the community”. By this, he meant “values, customs, and traditions that we should not neglect” in the face of modernisation, which he cited as being one of the primary goals of programmes such as Tatweer. AD1 and TM2 also included the notion of social values as an important component of the networking and cooperation mechanisms within and across schools. AD1 noted that traditional values often clash with modern ones within new teacher training programmes and expressed confidence that, with due attention to the sociocultural aspects of leadership training, this conflict can be successfully resolved. He also emphasised that this is evident in the socialisation dynamics that have evolved through the training programmes as “senior teachers and principals have found common ground with younger and alternative-thinking individuals”.

Overview

The policy-makers and training managers provided helpful theoretical and practical insights into the formal training programmes and policies created by the Saudi Ministry of Education in recent years. Their ‘insider perspective’ revealed the numerous opportunities for teachers’ professional development, including workshops with expert trainers and speakers, exchange programmes across educational institutions and internationally, and inspector-led and school-led opportunities, which have resulted in varying degrees of success in helping leaders and their schools to develop their full

potential. Many of the programmes for leadership development are seen as decentralised, and this is a double-edged sword. Decentralisation encourages new opportunities for leadership development and is empowering the regional inspectorates to take the initiative in training new leaders. However, the decentralised training framework has led to duplication of training initiatives, as well as gaps in training content, which has made programmes difficult to access. There were concerns among the participants that the leadership development programmes for teachers, which have improved in recent years, are still subject to unclear selection criteria and should be further monitored and evaluated.

The Tatweer programme was discussed at some length as it forms a major part of the overall training framework, especially as it aims to make schools more autonomous and accountable for students' and teachers' performance. In general, the participants expressed positive attitudes towards the evolution of the Tatweer programme as it has aligned more closely with its original philosophy of granting greater freedom to schools and encouraging creative and innovative thinking. However, there is concern that the Tatweer programme is not properly advertised to the different stakeholders, and this has negatively impacted the willingness of teachers to utilise the professional development opportunities that the Tatweer programme provides.

The policy-makers who participated in this project were well aware of the challenges that leadership development programmes in the country faced, such as inadequate curriculum, gaps in implementation in specific places, and unclear selection of participants and schools, but were unable to provide actionable solutions on how those challenges could be addressed. This indicates that leadership development programmes in the country have not been properly appraised and that the policy-makers do not see a clear path forward for strengthening the role of teacher and leader development and of socialisation.

The next chapter provides a cross-case analysis, linked to the findings from the policy-makers, and to the literature on school leadership development.

Chapter Nine: Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapters, linked to insights from the literature review. The chapter is structured into distinct sections, each focusing on a different theme arising from the findings. Five main themes are discussed:

- The development and self-development of school leaders in Saudi Arabia
- Formal and informal training strategies for leadership development
- Barriers to leadership development
- The impact of the Tatweer programme and selection criteria for participants in leadership programmes
- Socialisation and networking mechanisms for teachers and school leaders

The Development and Self-development of School Leaders in Saudi Arabia

Formal development

This topic was widely covered by the participants in the four schools, but it was mostly touched upon by the group comprising the policy-makers and training managers. This is because the latter group were more focused on the formal and bureaucratic aspects of teacher development and training programmes in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed that the formal opportunities for leadership development in Saudi Arabia are largely underutilised and even perceived as inadequate by those participating in them. Common criticisms included a lack of awareness of the available training opportunities (A2, D3), short duration of leadership development programmes (C3, B1), and the overly theoretical nature of the training intent (A1, D1). Most participants (especially the senior teachers) lamented that they have not participated in leadership development programmes, and even if they had, those programmes focus mostly on the pedagogical aspects of teaching rather than on the leadership aspects.

The underdeveloped framework for formal leadership development could be attributed to the partly decentralised nature of leadership development training as the policy-makers noted that the Ministry had set the general outline for teacher development, leaving the training centres and schools to fine-tune it. This perceived decentralised

approach by the Ministry of Education is paradoxical, given the generally centralised nature of the educational system in Saudi Arabia. It might be attributed to the MoE's belief that leadership preparation is a context-dependent process that does not require top-down control. At the same time, it may simply result from a lack of understanding among policymakers of the importance of a well-guided, comprehensive and consistent preparation process.

However, the widespread scepticism among participants regarding the formal opportunities for leadership training clearly indicates that the Ministry of Education has largely failed to develop a systematic programme for leadership development and to channel quality candidates into it. As the study of Sahlberg (2015) shows, the best way to produce effective school leaders is to develop comprehensive training programmes rather than rely on coaching and other informal procedures for leadership development. Hammad and Bush (2023) show that principals themselves recognise the importance of formal training. While the findings indicate the very existence of ad hoc programmes and in-school mentoring and coaching opportunities, which might contribute to knowledge transfer by exposing junior teachers to good practices, those initiatives cannot effectively supplement the formal training and leadership development programmes.

In the absence of a consistent, sufficiently detailed framework for leadership development, there are significant discrepancies between the leadership development and self-development practices in the different schools. In those schools that received insufficient funding for training and development (such as school A and school B), leadership development either stalled or was conducted in an exclusively informal manner.

School B's experience shows that there is a growing demand among teachers for initiatives that could develop leadership competencies. However, the lack of a clear programme for development and self-development and inadequate support networks through which those capacities can be developed is a problem common to all four schools. While the principal of school D encouraged teacher self-development, most initiatives were reported to be formal, detached from reality, and too generic

(participants D2, D6 and D7). Schools B and C developed in-house mentoring and coaching mechanisms, but those informal methods did not incentivise teachers to invest time and effort in their formal and informal leadership development. There was scepticism among some junior teachers (e.g. A5, D7, B6) that time spent in leadership development would result in improved career prospects or formal recognition, hence affecting motivation to attend both formal and informal training opportunities.

Previous research on leadership development has highlighted that formal leadership development is positively associated with improving the capacity of participants to influence the behaviour of other school members and to improve student outcomes. (Abdel-Hameed, 2021; Daniëls et al., 2019). Teacher leadership goes beyond just personal development, as it can also facilitate professional development inside the school (Poekert et al., 2012). Teacher leaders can guide their colleagues in meaningful and impactful professional development by facilitating the creation of communities of practice in which teaching practices can be evaluated collaboratively (Patton and Parker 2017).

Innovation and creativity were often mentioned by participants, especially the need for teachers to be self-starters and not to rely solely upon formalised programmes of training or external support and motivation. In this way, the findings complement existing research on the value of self-development for leaders (Walker & Reichard, 2020). Several interviewees stressed that formal development initiatives were often lacking and not very helpful for teachers (A1, A6, at school A and B1, B3 and B4, at school B) or simply not as important as intrinsic motivation and self-development initiatives (schools C and D). In this way, their sentiments resonate with existing research on principal leadership (Delport et al., 2021). For example, respondents B1 and B5 cited participating in leadership-related conferences and formal training on the execution of administrative and managerial tasks, but participant B3 still mentioned external courses and learning from colleagues' experiences as their major source of leadership development.

Self-development practices in the case-study schools

One of the most important factors shared by participants in schools B, C and D is the need for leaders to act as agents of positive change by proposing and implementing beneficial alterations to the curriculum, professional development programmes and leadership programmes. These would help not only the leaders themselves or their students but may also impact the entire school environment. In this way, teachers feel more inspired and empowered to become involved in decision-making processes, feel valued for their work and input, and are also able to perform better overall (Webb, 2005).

While some junior teachers (e.g., B6 and C7) note that formal leadership development opportunities have enhanced the performance of students, many other participants vouch concern that formal leadership training has limited practical benefit, especially for junior teachers (C5). These findings suggest that educators want to see more leadership development initiatives organised in the workplace, not borrowed or adapted from the nationwide programmes or created with a generic, one-size-fits-all approach. As most participants favour self-development, and with grassroots initiatives created inside specific schools by senior teachers (B3, B4, B7, C3, C5, D2 and D7), it seems that teachers grow more reliant on self-development with experience, while younger, junior teachers are often too optimistic about governmental programmes at the start of their careers. The great majority of school participants focused on the need to weigh development and self-development as equal priorities and opportunities for aspiring teachers to grow into successful leaders.

Chapman et al. (2010) argue that school improvement is most visible when the change agenda is locally owned, with teachers having the agency, rather than when change plans are imposed from above. This study set in Saudi Arabia shows that while this approach might create confusion and inconsistency in practice, it is nevertheless favoured by educators. The findings of this study show that school leaders' inherent motivation has been linked to improved engagement of teachers with the local community in school C, recognised by both junior and senior teachers. However, the findings revealed another important dimension of change leadership, namely that

organisational changes are produced when senior leaders share best practices with junior leaders (as happened in school B) and when the principal recognises and addresses the potential resistance to change (as in school A). Harris (2013) argues that principals are important gatekeepers for organisational changes, and their support or opposition to change agenda can directly impact the success of any school transformation. This was clearly visible in this study. In school A, the initiatives for leadership development were small in scope and duration because of the authoritarian approach to leadership practised by the principal. In school C, in contrast, the transformational and collaborative leadership styles of the principal and the senior teachers were found to generate informal, more contextually sensitive approaches to leadership development. These, in turn, led to greater satisfaction of junior and senior teachers with their opportunities for individual development.

Some senior teachers (e.g. A2, C3, and B3) claimed that self-development is an important intrinsic driver for building leadership competencies. The idea that self-development should be prioritised was also recognised by the policy-makers as this offers the opportunity for leaders to take the initiative. However, participants expressed different views about the impact of self-development. Teachers' self-development in schools A and B (e.g. A2 and B2) was positively associated with improved student outcomes and improved capability of the school leader to change the organisational environment. In school C, self-development resulted in enhanced agency and improved capacity for organising their own projects.

These findings support the argument of Leithwood et al. (2020) that school leaders can improve the performance of both students and staff by demonstrating high intrinsic motivation and influencing the staff's capacity for self-growth and development. Kasapoglu (2020) comments that when teachers are set on a self-development path, their leadership performance improves as well, entangled in a positive correlation dynamic. That view is largely supported by the findings of this study, as the participants across all schools shared that self-development contributes to leadership potential better than official training. A teacher's investment in self-development is seen as an integral part of leadership development to enable teachers to grow professionally and

as leaders. These observations are consonant with the concept of “self-leadership”, discussed by Warren (2021), which allows school leaders to influence and improve their school by first controlling and enhancing their own thinking patterns and professional behaviour.

School leadership and its role in career development

As school leadership is a challenging career path, it is increasingly important to prioritise the job satisfaction of current school leaders, as only those who are satisfied with their current work environment are likely to pursue promotion rather than employment in other sectors (Korkut & Llaci 2016). The findings of the present study confirm this assumption, as school C participants lamented perceived inadequate job security, while those from schools A and B noted that junior teachers do not receive sufficient institutional and professional support to help in their career development.

Alexandrou and Swaffield (2016) claim that it is crucial to view school leadership as a legitimate career path as this makes it easier to provide development opportunities and encourage school leaders to be proactive in self-improvement. However, the case-study participants identified multiple difficulties preventing them from pursuing careers as school leaders, such as inadequate pay and recognition (DD2), limited career opportunities (C1), and lack of sufficient courses to equip leaders with the qualities needed to exercise leadership (D2).

Challenges were also reported in relation to the formal programmes for teacher education, including a lack of depth in training programmes (A1) and training detached from the school context and needs (D1 and D4). The participants from the policy-making group were largely unfamiliar with those concerns, which suggests that there is inadequate collaboration and cooperation between teachers and policy-makers. According to Alexandros and Swaffield (2016), needs-based analysis is the first step towards implementing a career development programme and should be instituted before the introduction of a teacher development programme. This does not appear to have been conducted properly in the case study context, as multiple participants complained about not being able to find courses that would facilitate their own career growth and personal development.

Conversely, school C participants (C1, C3 and C4) shared positive views about the working group of teachers formed in their school, which provided self-development and school reform opportunities. Emphasis on self-leadership was also professed in school A, whose principal held the view that leaders should be self-starters who seek new opportunities and also try to help others to develop their full potential, a view also expressed by participants B1, B3 and B7. Participants at school D (D1, D3, D3 and D6) also discussed a mix of control and freedom for teachers and leaders to set and achieve their own goals because they see self-development as crucial for leadership. These ideas support the argument of Ripki et al. (2020) that leadership itself is not an inherent value but rather something that can be studied, attained and improved.

Institutional support for leadership initiatives

The value of an open environment that fosters healthy ambition and creativity was also mentioned by several interviewees. Whitaker (2012) argues that leaders are those tasked with enhancing an organisational environment for the better and that the principal plays a crucial role in creating and promoting a positive tone. Alnasser (2019) also claims that if teachers are not integrated into the school culture or are not well-acquainted with what it represents, they will not be able to prosper there as potential leaders.

This idea was discussed by school C participants. For example, C2 and C7 praised the role of their principal in supporting teachers, notably in realising their ideas and connecting them with parents and community members. Participant C4 also emphasised the value of freedom of manoeuvre and the ability to experiment in their school, which could transform their school environment into a more positive and fostering climate for all stakeholders. Teachers from school A claimed to choose the school because they were already familiar with the local culture and community, and the need for community engagement is what sustains their interest in leadership development initiatives. The local community factor was less present for schools B and D, although participants in both schools noted the collaborative and supportive learning environment that facilitates their own development.

Lieberman et al. (2016) argue that leadership is reliant on building and sustaining collaborative relationships, making characteristics such as coherence, content focus, instructional practice, sustainability, and collaboration crucial for effective professional development and bringing about modifications in teaching methods and the academic progress of students. Furthermore, teacher leaders are often experienced teachers with a proven track record, which lends them credibility (Nguyen et al. 2020). In this context, school leadership becomes a way through which experienced teachers can exert influence over other stakeholders, and even upon the school community, in a manner that improves teaching practice. (Nguyen et al. 2020). Teamwork plays a large role in this process, and participants from schools A and B mentioned that open communication and knowledge exchange help leaders. C2 held that teachers need to be given sufficient resources and support from their colleagues and environment while, at school D, being a team player was emphasised as a key leadership principle.

Although a school's culture is not easily subject to change and usually involves a joint effort by senior professionals, teamwork at the school level can be much more efficient than external reform initiatives by the Ministry of Education or other regulators (Barth, 2002). In this regard, A1, the principal of school A, reported taking all decisions in tandem with his faculty. Thus, teamwork is seen as a vital encouraging and motivating element of leadership development efforts at the school level, and it plays a greater role in teacher motivation in case-study schools than in formal training opportunities.

Formal and Informal Training Strategies for Leadership Development

The perspectives of the two main groups, policy-makers and training managers, and school participants, differed about the training opportunities available to schools and their current or future leaders. In particular, policy-makers and training managers sounded much more positive and enthusiastic about the training initiatives and were also more detailed in their accounts of these initiatives. In contrast, many school-based participants, for example, those in schools B and D, were not aware of the formal opportunities for leadership training. These school participants mentioned the need for the Ministry to do more to promote opportunities available to school leaders.

The literature has little to offer on this niche topic of how aware teachers are of leadership programmes. However, Clement and Vandenberghe (2001) argue that current school leaders should be involved in creating, as well as promoting, various leadership opportunities and initiatives for teachers, directly or indirectly, through the forging of a conducive and collaborative work environment. Bringing about changes necessitates collaborative professional development that is coherent, content-specific (Alexandrou & Swaffield 2016) and maintained over the long run (Nguyen et al. 2020)

The policy-makers also discussed their perception of the decentralised nature of the current Ministry model whereby schools are given guidelines on how to implement and offer courses and opportunities, as well as how to perform assessments and reviews. Almannie (2015) offers an alternative view, referring to the centralised and top-down nature of the Saudi educational system. Policy-makers and training managers are inside the educational system, and this may explain their different perspectives. Their view is that this approach is beneficial as it provides more freedom to individual schools. Still, it also results in disparities since the content of these opportunities varies, and schools use different assessment frameworks.

According to Alghamdi and Abdullgawad (2002), school leaders are often impeded by their lack of freedom in decision-making and cannot pursue their self-development goals or institute reforms at their institutions. However, a key influencing variable is school culture. Lee and Louis (2019) argue that If the shared school culture is built upon a commitment to enhancing students' achievements, collegial collaboration, and commitment to continuous learning and development, the barriers towards leadership development can be easily overcome.

According to Mitchell (2021), a school environment characterised by a culture of cooperation and support is necessary for fostering authentic teacher leadership. This is also witnessed in the schools that participated in the research. Leaders at School C have created their own working group where all feedback is welcome, and leaders and teachers are given the opportunity to be agents of change, pursue their own projects and contribute their own ideas and criticism. School B participants were also critical of

the decentralised approach embraced by the Ministry, claiming that it lacked a coherent vision and plan that would unify the disparate training frameworks and programmes.

Six interviewed teachers and one principal (A1, A6, A2, B1, B3, B4 and B7) complained that the available formal training is superficial or too generic, which made the courses unsuitable for the needs of the leaders in these schools. C1 also noted that he received only formal data about his job duties, instead of any substantial training, before taking the job, while D4 said that he obtained leadership skills from independent efforts and research rather than from formal seminars. Even the policymakers and training managers (e.g., TM1, DD3 and AD2) acknowledged that the concept of leadership is often ignored in training conferences, seminars and courses. Instead, these opportunities are more geared towards teaching curriculum-related skills. This lack of formal training may be a significant barrier to grassroots leadership development at the school level, as, according to Wenner and Campbell (2017), training programmes and options should resonate with the intended audience so that the principles, behaviours and values addressed through the training framework can be internalised. Elfernany (2019) adds that the most important factors to consider are the socio-cultural environment of the specific institution in conjunction with the needs of those who are to be trained. This means fostering a customised training programme for school leadership initiatives.

The policymakers discussed the creation of a leadership committee to bridge the gap between the Ministry and schools, but so far, it has not managed to solve the structural problems that schools face, such as the absence of adequate training opportunities and the perceived lack of adequate pay for teachers. The absence of a well-designed training framework and the reliance on exchange visits and rotation programmes have hampered school leaders from reaching their full potential (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2020). According to King and Bouchard (2011), having a well-organised programme is as critical as the level of teacher involvement, their positive attitude towards the process, and their collaboration with their colleagues. Another consideration is that some teachers may only take part for certification, not for the learning process, as indicated by some participants at schools B and D. Day, Harrison and Halpin (2012)

argue that an individual who has not internalised the drive to become a leader, and has not started creating a leader identity, cannot be counted as a leader, and certification cannot rectify this limitation.

Participants from school B (B1, B3 and B5) stressed the importance of both formal and informal training strategies, as leadership can be learned from others through knowledge exchange. These interviewees claim that leaders need to be encouraged as drivers of change to have their efforts recognised and appraised and, thus, to be better motivated. Three participants in school D (D1, D4 and D5), a Tatweer school, favoured informal training and exchange of ideas. The participants from school A focused on the need for future leaders to feel confident after their training, be it formal or informal, as they need to become accustomed to a new role. At school C, the most critical variable is perceived to be the creation of a tolerant and free culture and the teaching of soft skills such as interpersonal and decision-making rather than emphasising pedagogic training.

These findings are consistent with the view of Thessin (2019), who supports focusing on the quality of principal support for instructional leadership development at schools. Alazmi and Al-Mahdy's (2020) study in Kuwait also stresses the need for school leaders' authentic leadership development, which can raise teachers' engagement and spearhead educational reform. Schools C and B may epitomise this approach, as the principals have managed to establish a culture that encourages teachers' self-development efforts and engaging them in leadership growth.

Barriers to Leadership Development

The centralised nature of the educational system and a lack of teacher involvement in leadership development programmes emerged as significant barriers to building aspiring leaders' potential. While the Ministry of Education is responsible for designing the general outline of the training curriculum and requirements, it lacks control over how the actual leadership preparation is happening in schools. Although this can potentially give schools more freedom in determining how to pursue leadership development, it also results in confusion and inconsistencies in leadership programmes' content and delivery (Almannie, 2015). This situation is not unique to the KSA because Huber and Schneider (2022) identified the global trend toward centralised planning and quality

assurance of leadership development programmes but their decentralised provision and implementation. Moreover, the study confirms Alquraini's (2011) concerns about the centralised and hierarchical structure of the Ministry of Education being an unsuitable model for educational institutions that results in limited stakeholders' involvement. The level of teacher involvement in leadership development programmes was found to be suboptimal. This is a serious problem because, according to King and Bouchard (2011), having a well-organised programme is as important as the level of teacher involvement, their positive attitude towards the training process, and their collaboration with their colleagues.

Another commonly cited drawback of the existing leadership development programmes in the KSA relates to the increased workload and stress that teachers experience when they transition to more senior positions and leadership roles. The participants at all four schools talked about their current workloads, both in the classroom and outside, which, when combined, make their professional lives more difficult. As A1 explained, teachers are not ready to proceed from managing a class to managing an entire school without being properly trained for that position, while participant B2 noted that leaders are expected to exercise continuous development and modernisation of the school environment, which causes significant strain for all employees. These findings are supported by previous research. Leithwood (2007), Hammad et al. (2024), and Mahfouz and Gordon (2020) note that most leadership roles involve an administrative workload, such as writing reports. Thus, leaders should be ready to manage their formal duties alongside more creative and innovative tasks.

The lack of freedom and creativity associated with this bureaucratic and administrative workload appears to be stifling for teachers, as evidenced by the comments made by participants from all four schools. School B and C interviewees (B2 and B1, C5) were concerned that these additional duties discourage potential candidates and are detrimental for younger teachers, while D2 and D7 emphasised the perceived lack of understanding of the Ministry and its institutions towards the role of a "leader". As Churcher and Talbot (2020) explain, the corporatisation of education causes such negative effects as bureaucracy, boredom and lack of transformative possibilities for

educational leaders. Although the participants did not explicitly blame the centralised educational system for the mentioned barriers, it can be one of the reasons why they experience the high burden of bureaucratic tasks and limited autonomy.

The lack of internal institutional support for teacher development was also cited by participants in school C as a critical barrier to engaging and motivating teachers to assume leadership roles. This connects to Connolly, James and Fertig's (2017) observations that teachers act as educational leaders and are responsible for influencing others. Yet, they cannot bear responsibility for the functioning of the educational system. Therefore, comprehensive leadership development at the school level is impossible without institutionally organised support systems and proper division of leadership and daily school management roles traditionally associated with the principal.

Teachers and leaders perceive a lack of time that prevents them from allocating sufficient time to the pursuit of their development goals and makes them feel demotivated and fatigued. In particular, school A participants were worried that their current responsibilities allow them only to do their current job and discourage potential candidates for leadership positions. B2 and B1 added that they could not find the time to engage in formal or informal initiatives of self-development and polish their current skills or expand their knowledge. This left them feeling demotivated and might also influence the high turnover of candidates for leadership roles, as reported in school C. Additionally, teachers from school D noted that there is a lack of aspiring and suitable leaders.

This lack of candidates for leadership positions connects to the international literature on leadership turnover rates. This is due to several factors, including principal leadership style and workload stress (Ghamrawi & Al-Jammal, 2013). Heffernan (2021) discussed the importance of positive personal relationships as a major tool for school leader retention in Australia. DeMatthews et al. (2021) also named school leadership burnout and job-related stress as important causes of turnover, while Perrone et al. (2019) discuss the impact of administrative climate and early career teacher burnout on turnover rates in education. These data and literature indicate that principals should

focus on building a positive and flexible environment and teacher support to avoid high turnover and attain higher levels of teacher retention.

In terms of selection for development programmes, participants at schools C and D presented different perspectives. C1 and C7 were more concerned with the lack of information and vague criteria for selection. The latter criticised the practice of favouritism and the lack of proper penalties for lax teachers, which eroded the legitimacy of the institution. D1 and D2 also claimed that some teachers and leaders pursue development not for themselves but for show and status only. Favouritism and nepotism in any professional organisation may impact the well-being of employees and the organisation itself, as educators' perceptions of favouritism in the workplace are strongly linked to job satisfaction and job attendance (Diaz & Cruz, 2022).

The challenges listed by the policy-makers and training managers were quite different from those of the teachers. Wenner and Campbell (2017) argue that teachers understand their specific contexts and are thus well-placed to act as agents of change when given the chance to do so. However, Akkary (2014) comments that, in the Arab world, policy-makers create and implement educational policies which are not aligned with the needs and requirements of the socio-cultural world of schools, let alone the demands and specificities of individual schools. The policy-makers and training managers emphasised the lack of a structured approach and the piecemeal implementation of Ministry reforms. They also talked about the generic nature of the development programmes, which were implemented in schools with different needs and requirements and were not considered to be a good fit for some schools, as noted by several school participants. C1 mentioned the excessive focus on subject-specific training courses held by the Ministry, and C6 saw the use of "rigid teaching schedules" and "formalised assessment methods" in those programmes, which constrain teachers in the classroom. D3 added that "The Ministry – and even many, many schools – is so out of touch with how we think and why we think this way." This suggests that national educational policies are perceived to be generic and do not meet teachers' and principals' needs for development and growth.

The policy-makers and training managers talked about the need for a continuous feedback loop, not only for the schools but also for the other public units of the Ministry of Education that were charged with implementing, controlling or reviewing development initiatives. They added that the current lack of feedback also led to teachers being hesitant to share their ideas and to speak out concerning the negative aspects of their current school environment and development resources. Similarly, school B participants claim that some teachers feel demotivated to share their ideas openly because senior leaders do not listen to their feedback. Participant D5 mentioned that, in such environments, more senior leaders often place the blame upon their subordinates, which leaves the latter feeling helpless or uninspired, but they were not referring to their current schools. The case study findings are consistent with some literature on this topic. According to Tuytens and Devos (2015), schools implementing an integrated leadership approach and providing timely feedback to teachers are much more successful in promoting school improvement. Radinger (2014) also stressed the importance of school leader appraisal as a tool for strengthening teachers' pedagogical leadership and management skills.

The Impact of the Tatweer Programme and Selection Criteria for Participants in Leadership Programmes

The Tatweer project emerged in 2007 as King Abdullah's initiative to encourage the development of future generations of Saudis and to improve the nation's economic well-being (Tayan, 2017). The project's ambitious aim was to ensure that all students receiving public education in Saudi Arabia would be equipped with the skills required to become global citizens. Thus, Tatweer addressed teacher skills enhancement, curriculum improvement, school activity development and school facility and infrastructure development (Tatweer, 2014). As characterised by Wiseman, Astiz and Baker (2013), Tatweer was based on neoliberal principles and created a new context for education delivery in the KSA. Therefore, Tatweer aimed to create the circumstances in which human capital would be developed for financial growth and social cohesion (Tatweer, 2014). That reform touched upon motivating underachieving students and

focusing on continuous professional teacher development strategies to create an expert labour force to meet the demands of the 21st century (Tayan, 2017).

Tatweer and non-Tatweer schools

Two case-study schools (A and D) have been enrolled in the Tatweer programme. Most participants (A1, A5, D1, D4, D5) are mainly positive about the initiative. However, some (e.g., A3 and D5) are not that familiar with the concept and purposes of the programme, even though their schools are part of it. The participants mention improving structure and processes at both schools, as well as the opportunities provided, but they also comment that the programme was either too ambitious, implemented in a piecemeal fashion, or no longer relevant to their needs as teachers and leaders.

School A participants (A6, A2) do not believe that Tatweer and its related training programmes are relevant to the school context and would prefer training created by the school itself rather than being decided 'from the top'. School D interviewees (D2 and D3) were more optimistic, feeling empowered by the modernising of school processes and the decentralised decision-making. These findings are supported by Aslam and Rawal (2019), who claim that providing autonomy and a set purpose, fostering mastery of skills, and relatedness (or engagement) positively impact the motivation of individuals to perform well in their jobs.

The Tatweer programme is perceived as having started ambitiously but with its impact waning over time, resulting in less financial support (A1) and no real decentralisation of power (D2 and D7). The policy-makers (e.g. DD3) emphasised that some schools were eager to participate only for the financial aspect of the programme and were not truly interested in reforms. Even some Tatweer participants (A1 and A6) have lost their enthusiasm for the programme, which implies that it might be outdated and needs to be reformed or replaced. The programme was not perceived to have been implemented holistically and did not focus as much on leadership development as had been initially marketed. Participants D2 and D3 reported disenchantment because of the lack of expected training, while D7 was not even informed about the schedule of training and its goals. The lack of a coordinated plan and structure has alienated D3 and D7, who did not believe that the programme would be useful for their leadership development. The

lack of a clear plan or strategy coordinated with principals and teachers before being implemented negatively impacts their perceptions and their motivation, as also noted by Alyami (2014).

Some school A participants (e.g. A1) were not well-acquainted with the Tatweer programme and how it is implemented, perhaps surprising as this is a Tatweer school. The policy-maker group also acknowledged ignorance about the Tatweer programme, but little appears to have been done to address this. They also acknowledged that schools were not aware of the leadership training opportunities and often participated in Tatweer or utilised Tatweer funds for modernising classrooms and infrastructure rather than investing in teacher development, as also noted by the Tatweer school interviewees.

These findings are consistent with Lukacs (2015) and al-Shibani (2015), who ascribe the limited impact of the Tatweer project to policy-makers' mistake of ignoring teachers' voices and being deaf to teacher initiatives. Levinson et al. (2013) also reiterated that Saudi teachers are mostly seen as passive vessels instructed by reform planners on the exact steps to transform the school system without a proper understanding of those efforts or a commitment to them.

School B's application for Tatweer participation was rejected, and the participants were not well aware of the scope and purpose of the programme. B2 and B3 also complained about the Westernised nature of the planned programmes, which were perceived to be not in line with Saudi culture – a sentiment commonly shared in existing research (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Hammad & Alazmi, 2020b). This view was echoed by C3, who did not oppose Western practices but wanted them applied and reshaped to the Arab context. A consensus among scholars is that transferring foreign methodologies and strategies to an entirely different cultural context, if not adapted or transformed to fit the Saudi context, may be unsuccessful (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Hammad & Alazmi, 2020b; Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019; Mirghani, 2020). Care should be taken when applying them to a different culture, as this may result in a dysfunctional environment for students and teachers (G-Mrabet, 2012). These findings are of strategic

importance for leadership development in the educational sector in Saudi Arabia, as leaders need to balance authentic Arabic values and the country's striving for modernisation and globalisation with the need for educational quality linked to culture.

Schools B (B1, B6) and D (D3) participants also talked about the bureaucratic burdens (paperwork) and the aggressive change to teacher methods, which were not always in line with the leadership development strategy espoused by Tatweer, which supposedly aimed at granting greater autonomy to teachers. As also noted by AlKarni (2009), principals feel overburdened by administrative work, which does not provide them with sufficient time to develop educational leadership programmes. Despite the professed autonomy underpinning Tatweer, the Saudi educational system remains highly bureaucratic, and this limits the powers of principals to foster decentralisation and autonomous decision-making at their schools, leading to greater disenchantment with Tatweer and similar reforms, according to Alsalih (2010).

Selection criteria for leadership training and participation in Tatweer

The school participants, policy-makers and training managers also discussed the selection criteria for Tatweer and other leadership development opportunities. Some school participants (B2, B1, D1, D4 and D6) claimed the existence of favouritism, whereas the policy-maker group argued (TM1) that it was based on subjectivity rather than explicit favouritism. A2 mentioned the 'rampant nepotistic practices' in the selection process of participants for leadership programmes. They believe that this is owing to the centralised structure of the system where self-initiative and merit are often sacrificed because of favouritism. Participants from non-Tatweer schools agreed with this comment. School B (B1, B6) and C (C1, C3) interviewees claimed that there were no clear criteria for selection and that the implementation of Tatweer had created a two-tier system of favourite schools (those enrolled in the programme, mainly situated in Riyadh) and those excluded from it, with fewer opportunities for training. These views link to the OECD (2020) report, which portrayed the Saudi educational system as creating inequalities among schools, which could also negatively influence leadership development opportunities and practices as high-performing schools were selected more often than their low-performing counterparts for evaluation and training.

In contrast, TM2 claimed that there is no favouritism, as the courses confer no tangible benefits for participants. However, they did acknowledge that the selection criteria were often unclear or not well-regulated and that better monitoring and evaluation of formal programmes is needed. Consequently, they did seem to be aware of the negative perceptions of some teachers, that the selection process did not follow any clear justification. This implies that the Ministry does not have a consistent strategy to promote its Tatweer training programmes and recruit prospective educational leaders to them.

There is sound support for the negative impact of perceived favouritism, nepotism and role ambiguity on teacher attrition. In particular, a culture of favouritism in schools may reduce the internal motivation of employees and might increase withdrawal and turnover rates, as found by Diaz and Cruz (2022).

The policy-maker group offered a different view from the school-based participants, arguing that the selection criteria are rooted in the criteria of merit, professional qualifications, previous experience and current tenure of the applicants. They did concede that there is a subjective element in any selection process, including this one, and that some choices might be grounded in the selection committee's "intuition". They also accepted that selection criteria are not always well-explained to the schools and participants, which might create confusion and dissatisfaction.

Socialisation and Networking Mechanisms for Teachers and School Leaders

A major finding relates to the socialisation and networking practices and mechanisms experienced by school principals and participants in the case study schools in Najran. The data relate to the different styles of leadership and the associated role that organisational culture has to play at these Saudi schools, marking out the two different strands of a more authoritarian and rigid style and a more democratic and open style.

There is evidence of the differential impact of school culture on socialisation dynamics among school leaders. The participant groups, school leaders and teachers, policy-makers, and training managers, focused predominantly on the process of socialisation, with less emphasis on the practice of networking. Their comments related to informal

types of socialisation (e.g. peer-to-peer networking, informal gatherings and discussions, personal observations of the environment and culture) rather than the more formal and structured processes which are sometimes dictated by school etiquette or policy guidelines (e.g., formal introduction to faculty, reading of school policies, and acquaintance with protocols).

The primary research findings relate more to “personal socialisation” and “organisational socialisation” that these leaders experienced throughout their leadership journey, with its related aspects of value-building and identity transformation (Bush, 2018), and this stage often takes place during university training and internships for these teachers (Touchton et al., 2017). In particular, the policy-makers and training managers (DD1, TM2 and AD2) discussed the concepts and practices related to organisational socialisation, notably the teaching of specific skills and behaviours of teachers who aspire to become leaders. Some school B participants (B1, B3 and B7) also mentioned professional socialisation as an informal peer support network, which was perceived to be successful among younger teachers, as well as organisational socialisation, which has helped them to adjust to their new roles. At school C, both personal and organisational socialisation also forms part of a leader’s professional journey through regularly scheduled meetings and workshops where everyone can express their ideas and become accustomed to the working environment of the school.

According to some researchers (e.g., Crow, 2006; Heck, 2003), socialisation should not be approached as an unstructured process but should involve conscious and well-planned preparation. In contrast, the interviewees seemed to regard socialisation as a process of informal conversations, discussion and exchange among the teachers and principals at each school. In other words, they tended to limit this concept to only one element – networking. This may be because organisational socialisation is more geared towards individuals becoming acquainted with their co-workers and superiors, as well as the school environment and culture. However, a broader and more complex identity-shaping process for leaders (Touchton et al., 2017) was not discussed at all by these participants.

Leadership and its impact on teacher development

The findings revealed that, in school A, in particular, leadership is markedly authoritarian, which in turn makes the school culture more rigid and not as conducive to the further development of potential school leaders. The employees at such institutions are much more likely to follow a top-down approach and comply with the authoritarian tone set either by the principals themselves or by the Ministry of Education. School B participants (B4 and B2) also shared this view as they felt demotivated by senior leaders implementing their own strategy and goals without taking them into account or even asking for feedback from teachers. Some participants from school D (D2 and D5) also suggested that authoritarian leaders, in general, do not acknowledge feedback or their own mistakes, which makes it difficult to thrive and develop, especially for younger and less experienced teachers. These findings connect to the literature, which suggests that leaders follow a path of development that is ensconced within the framework of the educational system and society as a whole (Brody et al., 2010). Sarwar et al. (2022) add that, in a more authoritarian framework, teachers are less willing to improvise, pursue separate ideas and start their own initiatives outside the bounds of what their superiors have provided as guidance and policy.

The existing literature suggests that authoritarian leadership may indeed be perceived as less favourable than other leadership styles (Zheng et al., 2020). However, according to the school A participants (e.g., A1 and A3), working at an authoritarian-led educational institution did not have a negative impact on teachers' level of motivation, as assumed in some studies (Bikimane & Makambe, 2020; Bugyei & Aidoo, 2022). This discrepancy in perceptions suggests that while leadership style may be an important factor in boosting teachers' involvement and motivation, it is certainly not a panacea.

The authoritarian culture at specific schools may be linked to the centralisation of the educational system at different levels – from the Ministry to the individual schools. More junior teachers become fearful of sharing their ideas, suggestions and feedback with older colleagues or even principals because they fear a potential backlash, as reported by participants in school B, in particular. Senior teachers and school principals in an authoritarian environment are often deeply entrenched in their positions and beliefs,

which serves to further reinforce the existing culture and might serve to explain why school A participants did not provide negative feedback about the authoritarian rule at their school, in contrast to interviewees from other schools. Parlar et al. (2022) argue that the phenomenon of organisational silence is more likely in authoritarian-led institutions where employees become socialised or accustomed to the predominant method of work and are disinclined to voice dissent or share feedback.

Even at Tatweer School D, where the environment was described by the interviewees as open and democratic, there was still anxiety among younger teachers when talking to their superiors and elder teachers and trying to convey new ideas and feedback. Significantly, some participants from school C seemed convinced that implementing the Tatweer programme would reduce their current level of autonomy. Alquraini (2011) suggests that the centralised and hierarchical structure of the Ministry of Education is used as a model by the educational institutions, which limits their decision-making power and perceptions of autonomy and involvement. The critics of this system argue that decentralising decision-making power would boost the motivation of principals and teachers by making them feel more engaged at their respective institutions, for example by giving them a say in the creation of the curriculum (Almudarra, 2017).

The policy-makers and training managers presented a more nuanced attitude towards the establishment of a more decentralised system of leadership development, whereas the majority of teachers and principals at schools B, C and D seem to prefer this approach, even if it is not currently practiced in their schools. For example, school C participants seemed enthusiastic about the level of autonomy that they currently enjoy, even though they are not part of the Tatweer programme. Participants from school D (a Tatweer school) were quite expansive when talking about the need for greater autonomy to feel inspired and engaged in the decision-making process for the future direction and policies at their school. The policy-makers and training managers argued that decentralised programmes allow more opportunities and empowerment to individual schools, which would, in turn, foster creativity and innovation, but they also warned about the lack of structure and potential gaps in leader training and development.

The findings suggest that, in schools C and D (a Tatweer school), the organisational culture can be described as open and flexible. This, in turn, leads to a greater feeling of comfort in sharing one's ideas and feedback – even if that feedback happens to be negative – with senior colleagues. There was a marked perception that incumbent or aspiring leaders at such schools have more opportunities to grow in their career paths and to assume a more senior position. One part of the explanation supplied by some participants [e.g., D7, C1, C2 and C7], could be that democratic environments allow teachers to spend more time on their self-development goals, including extracurricular perspectives and pursuits. This phenomenon also exerts a positive influence on current and potential future leaders as it bolsters their overall motivation and morale and encourages them to enhance their potential and strive for a position of leadership. Patrick (2022), for example, links successful leadership to the notion of positive collaboration. Similarly, Turkoglu et al. (2021) argue that organisational socialisation can serve to strengthen and reinforce a culture of openness and cooperation and can simultaneously bolster teacher efficiency, both individually and collectively.

Liggett (2022) suggests that, at democratically led institutions, there is more collaboration among teachers (as peers), and between teachers and principals, in addition to an overall feeling of trust, openness and mutual support. However, school C participants raised an important issue about the fast-paced nature of their democratic culture, which might intimidate some aspiring leaders who are learning from their superiors. Jong et al. (2022) argue that, even in the most collaborative and open environment, the development of an individual school leader still depends upon their personal characteristics and their attitude towards work and learning processes. At school B, for example, the informal means of networking available to teachers were welcomed. Still, some participants (B2 and B6) were anxious that despite this, younger teachers might not feel that their voices are being heard by senior leaders and management. Lin, Yin and Liu (2022) claim that it is not sufficient to have a more open environment for leadership development, but teachers, especially more inexperienced ones, need to have the right perceptions and growth mindset necessary to thrive in such an environment. This is consistent with the case study findings that many teachers (e.g.,

D1, D6, B1, B3 and B5) rely on formal training initiatives and expect much from them instead of focusing on their self-development.

The importance of engaging with other stakeholders, including the local community and parents, is also not to be underestimated. Even at more authoritarian-led schools such as school A, some of the participants (A2 and A1) recognised the need to meet the needs of the community, although opinions varied as to the extent that one should be “entrenched” within such an environment. Three policy-makers and training managers (DD2, AD1 and TM1) also shared this view, emphasising the need for school leaders to be acquainted with the local communities. Participants from school C (C3, C5 and C7) also pronounced themselves in favour of forging closer ties with the community as that provides school leaders with a perspective of the importance and scope of their educational and transformative work. School D interviewees (e.g. D4) also discussed the need for involving external stakeholders, which fosters collaboration and makes communities feel more engaged in the educational journey of their children, and also motivates teachers and school leaders to perform better.

The case-study data connect with Epstein’s (2010) view that school-community partnerships have positive effects upon the well-being of communities, helping in the enhancement of curricula and educational processes, as well as supporting students and their families. Similarly, Fitzgerald and Militello (2016) argue that school leaders need to learn how to collaborate with communities as equal partners and to take advantage of the collective wisdom and passion of these communities to build transformational and constructive learning journeys and to help perpetuate learning in the community rather than simply in the classroom. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2020) observe that building collaborative partnerships with families and communities is an effective leadership practice, but the findings of the present study indicate that school leaders in Saudi Arabia struggle to establish collaborative relationships with local communities.

Socialisation and culture

Socialisation also forms an important part of an individual’s adaptation to a new organisational culture, for example, if they are transferred to a different school. This is

especially important if they have not had the time to prepare or to engage in anticipatory socialisation to know their new school environment before the transfer, as noted by some of the interviewees from school A. A2, for example, shared that he felt more comfortable at a new school only after eight years of work due to extensive practice, and A1 pointed out the significance of knowing the local culture, customs and peculiarities as a contributing factor to socialisation for newcomers.

Hallinger and Heck (2011) comment that entering a novel environment for the first time is stressful because novice principals are forced to navigate more than one aspect of the job, including adapting to the social dynamics at the new school. Crow (2006) adds that building or transforming their identity from teacher to principal can also be a challenge. Crow et al. (2017) also note that leader aspirants need, first, to develop their professional identity and individual skills and knowledge, which can happen most easily through socialisation and can thus pave the way for their leadership development journey. The interview data confirm this view. For example, school B participants emphasised the need to have a framework of preparation in place for upcoming leaders and principals, while school D interviewees stressed that becoming acquainted with the values of an organisation facilitates and quickens the process of adaptation and leadership growth.

Socialisation is also used as a medium of collaboration among school colleagues in more open and democratic environments (Türkoğlu et al., 2021). However, in the present research, most participants focused on the notion of socialisation to solve problems, for example, in school D, rather than on other aspects of cooperation, such as working together to make a positive change at their institution. Conducting formal educational initiatives, such as structured socialisation and having teachers attend leadership development and skill enhancement courses, can help them develop better self-efficacy and, as a result, exhibit better professional competencies (Desiriani et al., 2023). In particular, organisational socialisation helps new members to adjust to established group norms of behaviour and expectations, helping them to become more proactive and effective in the group (Semin, 2019).

Some participants, notably in schools C (C3 and C4) and D (D1 and D6), discussed the exchange of ideas and practices among colleagues, especially those of a different professional ranking. This seems to relate to Szeto's (2021) comment that junior teachers should not be fearful of speaking out and sharing feedback with senior colleagues. On the contrary, they feel empowered to make their own decisions, as principals usually provide them with more duties but also more freedom, and discussions are much more likely to take place in an egalitarian manner where any teacher can contribute (Szeto, 2021). As participants D2 and D4 noted, the greater the autonomy given to leaders, the more incentivised they feel to make their own decisions and pursue their leadership goals. They also focus on the importance of active listening to the feedback provided by other individuals, which helps to improve the organisational culture and comfort of aspiring leaders. Similarly, in school C, working groups are utilised to improve and enhance this process, where feedback seems to be organised in a constructive, two-way manner. In contrast, however, school B participants commented that there were internal barriers to socialisation, as more experienced teachers were reluctant to share their knowledge for fear of being ousted from their positions.

Overview

The culture at a specific school is highly dependent upon the leadership style of the principal or the senior team of school leaders. Whether democratic or authoritarian, the culture instils a set of values within current and future employees of that particular school. The differences between and among the perspectives at the case-study schools can be attributed to the leadership style and culture that characterised them. While at school A the leadership style and culture were more authoritative and formal, schools C and D exhibited more flexible, open and loyal leadership styles, favouring teachers' self-development efforts and initiatives. At school B, most leadership and development were also executed informally, with the principal leading by example. Overall, there was a stronger focus on self-development and school-level leader development initiatives than on formal Tatweer and non-Tatweer efforts of the Saudi authorities, as the latter were characterised as detached from context, generic, and not helpful.

While centralised and authoritarian systems proved more stifling to younger teachers and budding leaders, more flexible and democratic structures provide the impetus to explore the path to leadership development and to be more open towards collaboration with colleagues and other leaders. The lack of more formalised methods and practices of networking and socialisation makes the application of “professional”, “personal”, and “organisational” socialisation somewhat less relevant in this context. However, anticipatory socialisation seems to characterise the opportunities to become acquainted with the role and responsibilities of a principal while they are still engaged in their teacher roles. At this point, they become acquainted not only with the organisational environment but also with the notion of leadership. This mode of informal apprenticeship is especially useful for younger or novice teachers, and around half of the school participants fall into this category, as they are much less confident when introduced to a new environment and hence require support from their more experienced co-workers, which can be accommodated through formal and informal means of socialisation (Desiriani et al., 2023; Semin, 2019).

These findings also concur with the views of Sadeghi, Yazdani and Afshar (2019) that the process of socialisation can be described as transforming the individual’s role and understanding and also acting as a self-reinforcing phenomenon, meaning that teachers adapt to a particular culture and set of values, internalise them and later become their advocates. The most structured approach to socialisation comes from school D, which holds little surprise as it has taken part in the Tatweer programme and, because of this participation, there are structured socialisation and networking practices of teachers at that school compared to its counterparts not included in the programme.

Barriers to leadership development identified by participants relate to external and internal factors. Some found the lack of resources, financing and institutional support to be the primary reason for their lack of leadership development, while others were more focused on the lack of motivation and internal drive. These distinctions suggest a broader divide between teachers expecting formal training and not driven to exercise initiative in leadership development and those who assume responsibility for their leadership path due to careful guidance and effective informal training from seniors.

It is also vital to note the confusion about the Tatweer programme's goals, principles and expected scope of training identified among participants. Those new to the programme and those experienced in it were equally confused about its specifics and often talked about it as too generic and detached from specific school contexts. Therefore, it is recommended that the Saudi Ministry of Education take a more grassroots approach to leadership development by customising educational initiatives to specific schools or financing school-level leadership development programmes to achieve maximum effects.

The next and final chapter is the conclusion.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This final chapter has three main sections. First, it shows how the research questions have been addressed through the enquiry, showing that the study has provided answers to the problems it set out to investigate. Second, the chapter examines the study's contribution, with claims to contextual and methodological significance. The chapter also considers the implications for policy and practice arising from the research. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations for further research on the theme of leadership development in Saudi Arabia and reflects on how the findings can enrich the global research on leadership development.

Answering the Research Questions

The study addressed five research questions. These questions are:

Research question 1: How are leaders of boys' secondary schools developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

Research question 2: What are policymakers' and participants' perspectives on school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

Research Question 3: How have networking and socialisation among teachers influenced leadership development?

Research Question 4: How does the Tatweer Programme influence leadership development practices in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

Research Question 5: What are the barriers leadership development is facing in Najran, Saudi Arabia

The answers to the research questions are discussed below:

Research question: 1 How are school leaders developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

The first research question relates to how school leaders are developed in Najran.

The research found three main channels through which teachers attempt to build their leadership capabilities: through programmes conducted by the Ministry, through school-led initiatives and through self-development initiatives.

Programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education

The study revealed that training providers perceive the existing framework for leadership development to be excessively decentralised, with regional inspectorates and schools primarily responsible for designing their own programmes for professional and leadership development. The decentralised nature of the leadership training framework promoted by the Ministry gave the impression that it has no plan for how to build leadership skills. However, policy-makers claim that the Ministry is actively working on multiple initiatives to enhance leadership capabilities through developing soft skills. They also report that the Leadership Committee, which is part of the Ministry of Education, is taking proactive measures to identify individuals with underdeveloped leadership potential and introduce them to new opportunities for skills development.

Exchange programmes were also utilised to facilitate collaboration, networking, and the exchange of ideas between junior and senior teachers across different schools and internationally. Even though policymakers expressed optimism about these initiatives being suitable for disseminating good practice, offering solutions to complex problems in classroom settings, and building the soft skills of potential educational leaders, many exchange events were perceived to lack a validated methodology for promoting leadership skills. The positive attitude of the policymakers towards the content and outcomes of the current initiatives is not surprising, but the school teachers and principals do not share such a positive evaluation. For teachers and principals, the leadership development programme is insufficient to address the current needs of junior and senior teachers and should be expanded significantly.

The pivotal role of the Ministry of Education in advancing the leadership development programme was recognised in the schools, although there were substantial cross-school differences in the perceived effectiveness and contributions that the Ministry-led educational programmes have on developing leadership capabilities. In general, the schools that were engaged in the Tatweer programme had more opportunities for

leadership development and capacity building than the schools that remained outside the programme. However, it seems that few teachers utilise those programmes effectively, as two out of the three senior teachers in school A admitted that they have not participated in leadership training even though their school is involved in the Tatweer programme, and they had easy access to leadership development interventions. While some participants (especially those from school A) missed important training opportunities, others, for example in school B, complained about a shortage of conferences, seminars, workshops and other practical training in the specialised centre of the Ministry. Those differences could be explained by the limited outreach of the Tatweer programme, as well as by the modest funding dedicated to leadership development and by the disruption of the educational service because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be concluded that the programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education are important for developing the leadership capacities of teachers who participate in them, but junior and senior teachers have mixed views about their relevance and value.

School-led initiatives for leadership development

The findings indicate that some schools have developed their own initiatives to develop the leadership capacities of their teachers. Those initiatives were mostly positively evaluated by those who participated in them. The policymakers praised some schools for creating their own SMART objectives and introducing measurable criteria for evaluating the teachers' professional development. What was notable, however, was the difference in the scope and outreach of the school-led initiatives for leadership development. For example, such initiatives were absent in school A, as the participants acknowledged that they were not receiving the institutional and school support they needed to realise their leadership potential. Quite different was the experience of school C, which has developed its own programme to encourage teachers to engage in leadership activities and those initiatives were perceived by participants to be largely successful in supporting skills development.

School-led initiatives for leadership development were both structured and unstructured. Unstructured leadership development initiatives were conducted in school B, through an

exchange of practices and personal experience and examples that others were expected to follow. Informal initiatives were also praised by participants in school D for fostering socialisation and networking among peers and creating a positive atmosphere in the school that encouraged teachers to develop themselves.

Structured initiatives were conducted in both schools C and D, and those were praised by participants in both schools for offering opportunities to practice leadership. One of the most impactful initiatives in school C has been creating a working group that included senior teachers. The group aimed to foster collaboration among teachers in identifying the best pedagogical practices. While the fundamental purpose of the group was to improve the classroom experience, those who participated in it had the opportunity to set a vision of teaching practice, empower others to change their working practices and gain experience as change agents. Thus, the working group offered a formal platform for participants to channel their various school-related initiatives and receive feedback. The experience of school C highlights that school leadership development initiatives should be practically oriented to provide the participants with opportunities to practice various leadership skills. The junior members of the school were granted the freedom to organise their own events, which fostered their growth as managers and organisers while also being subjected to thorough evaluation and assessment to aim for teaching standards to be maintained within the school.

A similar role was performed by the excellence team in school D. This team provides teachers with practical opportunities for developing their leadership skills. It enabled the school to encourage teachers to pilot different programmes for improving conditions in the school and thus become change leaders. Such programmes can also be beneficial for teachers in other schools. Participants from school B recognised that school leaders should be able to manage changes, including driving a shift in organisational culture. It appears that teachers at School B have not successfully cultivated their change management skills to the extent necessary to effect a significant transformation in the school's organisational culture and could benefit from borrowing the School D model to promote change leadership.

It appears that school-led initiatives are the primary means for leadership development in the case-study schools, but their ad-hoc nature means that their value might be limited.

Self-development

Considering the limitations of the formal leadership development programmes, it was not surprising to see that many participants emphasised self-development and considered it an essential factor for supporting their personal development programmes. The findings revealed that the innate desire for self-development is an important driver for leadership development across all schools, although self-development was interpreted differently across the four schools. Senior teachers in school A recognised that the first step in becoming a school leader is to recognise one's training needs and take proactive steps to address them. For teachers in school B, self-development meant addressing their own training needs and being informed about the latest international and regional developments, with senior teachers acknowledging that they regularly attend conferences to inform themselves about new developments and practices. The idea that leadership capabilities should be self-developed rather than developed through formal education was the view of the senior teachers in schools A and B, even though they recognised that such self-development efforts are not always adequately evaluated by their peers.

Self-development initiatives seem to be more popular in schools where informal opportunities for leadership development are lacking, notably in schools A and B, and in contrast, they are less popular in School C, which has carried out numerous in-house initiatives for leadership development. However, two school C teachers recognised that aspiring school leaders need to develop themselves without relying on external support, which might be lacking. While teachers from schools A and B believe that self-development initiatives are the way forward for leadership development, some teachers seem to set quite unambitious goals for themselves, believing that they are not ready to become school leaders and that self-development programmes cannot achieve much.

Teachers in schools C and D were provided with greater autonomy than those in schools A and B, and enhanced autonomy enabled them to pursue and implement their

self-development projects. Being in control of one's professional development programme and having sufficient self-discipline was identified by the principal of school D as more important for building leadership capacities than participating in training seminars or leadership conferences. Empowering school leaders was also perceived to be an important step towards ensuring that teachers can invest time and effort in their development and build upon the knowledge and skills they have gathered through external training opportunities. Even though participants across all schools mentioned an innate desire for self-development, this was not mentioned by the policymakers, who emphasised the growing number of formal and informal opportunities available to teachers without recognising many of the limitations of those programmes.

The research has demonstrated that the perceived shortcomings of the Ministry-led programmes for leadership development have encouraged junior and senior teachers to utilise school-led and self-development initiatives to develop their leadership skills and potential. The participants praised those alternative channels for leadership development because they enabled them to build soft skills and leadership capabilities they could not acquire elsewhere. However, the extensive focus on ad-hoc initiatives indicates that Ministry-led programmes are not sufficient to support teachers in building their leadership potential.

Research question 2: What are policymakers' and participants' perspectives on school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

Participants' perspective on leadership development programmes were discussed in the findings' chapters, with two main topics being identified: leadership styles and soft-skill development, and the limitations of the leadership development programmes.

Leadership styles and soft skills development

The policymakers recognised that significant transformations are taking place in Saudi programmes for teacher education, particularly in recent years, as there is now a stronger emphasis on fostering leadership skills. One deputy director recognised that leadership development programmes were well integrated into the overall framework of the Ministry's plans for teachers' development, with leadership being part of the seminar

agenda. However, training managers noted that the training programmes focus on transactional and transformational leadership styles, and insufficient attention has been paid to other leadership styles. Some of the training managers also shared the concerns of school A and B participants, that the current training programmes seem too focused on theoretical issues, even though efforts have been made in the past few years to make them more practically oriented.

There was a significant difference between policymakers' and participants' perspectives on the opportunities for soft skills development provided by the current formal initiatives for leadership training. The deputy directors interviewed for this project recognised that the Ministry has courses that cover areas such as promoting new technologies, introducing creative thinking and innovation, and promoting STEM-based teaching. New courses were also designed to enhance teachers' mediation, facilitation, and mentoring skills. An assistant director also noted that the Ministry had shifted its focus away from promoting subject-specific courses and that the new curriculum focuses on essential skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence, reflective thinking, and having strategic vision or direction. However, the teachers and principals who participated in those studies did not see such a reorientation of the training programmes, as both school B and C participants consider the current training initiatives to be not prioritising soft skill training to a sufficient extent.

One reason why the two groups have such different views about the current soft skills training could be explained by the perceived failure of the Ministry of Education to market the current training opportunities adequately. This limitation was mentioned by almost all study participants, with many junior teachers lacking awareness of current initiatives for teacher education, and many of those who worked in Tatweer schools failed to utilise the available opportunities for personal development.

The limitations of the training programmes

The current programmes for leadership development suffer from numerous limitations in relation to their content, duration and approach. Evidence from schools B and D indicate that the over-theoretical focus of the leadership development training was a major deterrent, as they would prefer more practically oriented courses rather than lectures on

theory. Due to their theoretical focus, the programme was perceived to fail in providing opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and more active engagement through which participants could develop their critical thinking skills and managerial potential. Participants in school D commented that the leadership development programme suffers from an overly theoretical focus and lack of focus, depth, and alignment with the "real-life environment" of Saudi schools. Insufficient awareness and knowledge about such programmes, along with concerns about the criteria used to select participants, were the key factors that deterred school D participants from engaging more with the formal opportunities for leadership development.

In contrast, participants from School C believe that the problem with the existing programmes for teachers' leadership development is that they place excessive emphasis on teaching and pedagogical aspects without adequately acknowledging the importance of the strong interpersonal skills required to handle the increasing responsibilities associated with leadership roles. Evidence from school A also indicates that the current leadership development programme has an outdated curriculum, and as a result, they cannot induce older teachers and principals to change their ways of working.

Another problem was the perception. for example, in school D, these programmes primarily focus on enabling participants to obtain professional certificates rather than providing substantive content aligned with the programme objectives, with some arguing that the leadership development programme is superficial. Similarly, school C participants claimed that leadership development courses were organised by experts whose main aim was to popularise their own work and practice rather than to develop the skills of the attendees. School A and participants claimed that many of those who participated in the leadership training organised by the Ministry were motivated by their desire to obtain a certificate, and, once this is accomplished, they have no motivation to apply the leadership skills they acquired during the course.

While it is important to acknowledge the deficiency in the delivery of leadership development programmes, their main perceived weakness is their content. The researcher found evidence that these leadership development initiatives, both in

Tatweer (school A) and non-Tatweer (schools B and C), did not achieve their objectives. Ministry-led leadership development courses were perceived to provide participants with nothing new, as they were focused mainly on familiarising them with the administrative requirements of leading schools.

Participants, for example, in schools A and C, also claimed that the leadership development programmes were too short. However, despite those disadvantages, junior teachers from schools A, D, and C still perceive such programmes as useful, as they provide an opportunity for socialisation and networking with more experienced peers.

Those participants who attended training and seminars independent of the Ministry programmes considered them to be more helpful and practically oriented than those conducted by the Ministry. Overall, the findings revealed that teachers seek to enhance their leadership competencies by participating in numerous formal and informal initiatives for leadership development. However, there are several perceived shortcomings in the programmes offered by the Ministry of Education, suggesting that leadership development courses need substantial revisions to achieve their aims.

Research Question 3: How have networking and socialisation among teachers influenced leadership development?

Since the opportunities for formal leadership training were limited, peer networking and socialisation played an important informal role in capacity building in all the case study schools. The participants experienced different forms of socialisation – anticipatory, personal, organisational and professional.

Anticipatory socialisation

In relation to anticipatory socialisation, the study found that participants across all four schools were engaged in self-development in anticipation of a potential promotion to a leadership position. The drive for self-development was stronger among senior teachers than junior colleagues, as the latter often struggled to see school leadership as a genuine career path. In school B, for example, the high-performance standards expected of teachers encouraged participants to embrace positive behaviours and promote quality teaching practices that facilitated their anticipatory socialisation. A

similar approach was implemented in school C, where the various initiatives promoting a culture of excellence within the school also helped the participants to internalise school objectives and to spend extra time and effort developing their leadership competencies. While, in schools C and B, the approaches for facilitating organisational socialisation were ad-hoc, driven by the organisational culture, school D utilised a more structured approach to facilitate anticipatory socialisation. The so-called Excellence team served not only as a suitable testing ground for new initiatives but also as a way through which new teachers could, through networking with their peers, understand the standards, values and behaviours that could help them in their future careers.

Anticipatory socialisation was less experienced in school A, which did not have the same initiatives as schools B, C and D to engage teachers in anticipatory behaviours. Indeed, various ad hoc initiatives in the different schools, such as the change management projects in school C or the community engagement projects in school D, provided opportunities for participants to develop their leadership skills and abilities. While those initiatives were mostly unstructured, they were valued by those who participated in them as they provided them with opportunities for self-development that could not be obtained otherwise. In particular, junior teachers in schools C and D valued the organisational skills and greater autonomy they enjoyed while engaged in those projects. Both schools B and D fostered an organisational culture that facilitated the exchange of ideas and practices among participants, in which junior teachers could effectively observe and learn positive behaviours from their more senior colleagues and facilitate their anticipatory socialisation and organisational socialisation.

Professional socialisation

The study's findings revealed that professional socialisation could take different forms in the four case study schools. Participants across school A, for example, believed that the internal drive for development and continuous improvement should guide teachers to prepare themselves for leadership positions. School leaders in school B, however, emphasised the formal training opportunities for capacity building and leadership development. Despite their disadvantages, they provided a useful background to help participants accommodate the demands of leadership roles. In school C, professional

socialisation was facilitated by encouraging leaders to develop their own projects for improving the learning and teaching process, while, in school D, observation and peer exchange were important to ensure that junior and senior teachers become equipped with the skills they need. However, there was also concern among junior teachers from school D that formal and informal initiatives do not provide a platform through which junior teachers could fully express their ideas, which was echoed by junior teachers from C, who found their colleagues reluctant to accept negative feedback. However, this view was not shared by senior teachers, especially those from school C, who praised the informal leadership development opportunities, for providing impetus for networking and collaboration.

The participants employed both formal and informal channels to facilitate their professional and anticipatory socialisation. Those included benefiting from the formal training opportunities available through the Ministry and the Tatweer Programme, attending online and offline conferences and workshops, and seeking feedback and assistance from their colleagues. However, there were notable differences across the schools on the perceived effectiveness of those initiatives, as it seems that professional socialisation occurs more effectively in schools that follow informal development practices rather than formal ones. For example, participants from both School A and School B lamented that they learned nothing from the formal leadership development initiatives. In turn, schools C and D relied more on informal development practices and enjoyed higher levels of professional socialisation. The most encompassing initiatives for professional and organisational socialisation were held in school C, where teachers were encouraged to participate in workshops to exchange leadership experience. In school D, open communication between junior and senior members promoted organisational and professional socialisation, especially for junior teachers, who needed to learn expected behaviours. The perceived success of schools C and D in promoting the professional socialisation of their members also highlights the critical role of school culture in facilitating professional socialisation. Having a democratic leadership culture of helping every student attain their potential encourages teachers to engage in professional socialisation and to learn from their peers.

Participants from the policymakers group mentioned that exchange programmes and collaborating with teachers from different schools could provide networking opportunities for participants to obtain peer support outside their organisation that can further facilitate their professional socialisation. There was a marked preference for the informal channels of personal socialisation, such as peer learning, especially among the schools (A and D) which did not participate in the Tatweer Programme, although there was not enough evidence about whether such informal initiatives could promote learning across the whole organisation.

Organisational socialisation

The school culture is also important in promoting organisational socialisation in the four schools. The more open and democratic the leadership style, the greater the incentive for participants to engage in organisational socialisation and hone their leadership and teaching skills. An open and transparent school culture, guided by democratic leadership styles, helps new teachers to feel appreciated at their workplace and encourages them to invest in themselves, as the participants in school C indicate. Evidence from school B also shows that authoritarian leadership styles led to premature rejection of new ideas introduced by the school administration. The standards of educational excellence pursued in schools B and C incentivised junior teachers to learn and develop themselves and to seek support from their more experienced peers on how to resolve problems or conduct new initiatives. The process of organisational socialisation aids new teachers in acclimatising to group standards of conduct, enabling them to enhance their productivity and effectiveness within the school.

In school A, the principal was the main figure enabling organisational socialisation, as junior teachers depended on him to provide guidance and solutions. In school C, organisational socialisation was facilitated through regular informal meetings, peer learning, and formal working groups to disseminate good practice, even though those informal channels could not reach everyone. In school B, however, those informal meetings seem not to have yielded the expected results, as the input from the junior members was not adequately considered.

The constant interaction with peers was the main factor driving the professional socialisation of senior and junior teachers, as peer exchanges helped to develop an understanding of school leadership. Those interactions helped them to become familiar with their profession's expectations and to develop as leaders. While senior teachers might not be receptive to peer feedback, it appeared that School D promoted a culture of open communication. In school B, networking with peers helped the participants to learn practices from their colleagues and to develop a sense of community that encouraged professional development. The formal training received through the Tatweer Programme and through the programmes that the Ministry conducted was also positively evaluated in facilitating professional socialisation, although some participants complained about its theoretical focus and its emphasis on providing subject-specific knowledge (C1) rather than focusing on soft skills.

Networking with the local community was discussed by the participants in schools C and D, revealing two completely different experiences. In school C, the opportunities for socialisation with the local community were lost, as school leaders have not prioritised developing sufficiently strong ties with the local community, which also led to conflict with parents. In school D, however, the leader managed to involve the local community in the educational process, while TM2 from the policymaker group mentioned that training focused on improving interaction between teachers, parents and students was very positively evaluated by the participants, which indicates that the Ministry is considering supporting further training that can help teachers better understand the community needs and involve the local community in the teaching process.

School leadership competencies were developed through extensive networking inside and outside the school. While participants from school B observed a reluctance to share their practices, especially with teachers outside the school, the school D principal considered that decisive leadership requires principals to put themselves in the shoes of other teachers. Networking between teachers was also important for improving the school culture as it encouraged participants in networking initiatives to bring positive experiences back home.

Research Question 4: How does the Tatweer Programme influence leadership development practices in Najran, Saudi Arabia?

The benefits of the Tatweer Programme

The participants in the Tatweer Programme report that the programme facilitated the introduction of novel, more sophisticated teaching methods and encouraged the development of an innovation-driven curriculum and practice. Senior teachers from the Tatweer Programme schools (school A and school D) praised the leadership development opportunities that the Programme provided as pedagogically sound and developed on the basis of a strong and rigorous methodology that supports educational excellence. The Programme was perceived to be important by junior teachers in schools A and D, who recognised that the courses helped them to develop their autonomy and independence and acknowledged that the programme enriched their understanding of the different leadership styles that could be applied in the classroom and beyond.

However, the primary purpose of the Tatweer Programme was to provide a programme for innovation and development in schools rather than being focused on improving teachers' leadership capacities. Tatweer schools' principals (school A and school D) considered the programme to be an important instrument for teacher empowerment and for facilitating the creation of professional communities in schools while also recognising that the programme encouraged the professional socialisation of teachers and the exchange of good practices. Senior teachers from Tatweer Programme schools were more involved in the programme than junior teachers as the latter group perceived that they were not adequately briefed about the scope of the programme and the opportunities it provides.

The training conducted under the auspices of Tatweer strengthened the problem-solving and decision-making capacities of the participants, especially among senior teachers in school D. The programme also fostered collaboration and knowledge transfer between the trainees and the trainers by encouraging senior teachers to lead the way and share their experience with the rest of the team. Evidence from school A also shows that the main beneficiaries from Tatweer are the principals, who are

provided with additional training and resources to facilitate their professional development. The Tatweer programme was also an important driver for advancing the change management agenda in schools as the programme encouraged senior teachers to think 'outside the box' and introduce new approaches to teaching and learning.

The Limitations of the Tatweer Programme

While the development of the Tatweer programme could be used as evidence that the Saudi Ministry of Education wants to develop leadership potential in schools, it is perceived to be patchy, incomplete, and available only for certain schools. Senior teachers from school B were not properly informed about the Ministry's plans to support leadership development, highlighting the need to develop a cohesive programme.

However, the leadership development aspect of the Tatweer Programme was criticised as there were concerns that the schools participating in the programme were chosen haphazardly and perhaps also in a biased manner. The policymakers argued that the selection process for the various professional development programmes under Tatweer should be optimised to ensure that the most promising candidates can access the programme. In addition, evidence from school B also indicates that the programme mostly covers schools located in Riyadh, with limited involvement of schools from other regions.

The findings also show that leadership development training conducted within the Tatweer Programme focuses mostly on developing participants' subject-specific knowledge rather than developing leadership skills. There were concerns among senior teachers in schools A and D that Tatweer has become an umbrella programme encompassing various initiatives and that leadership development is marginalised compared to other initiatives, such as those focusing on technological upgrades. Participants from non-Tatweer schools (B and C) focused on the technological improvement that Tatweer facilitates rather than its leadership development programmes, highlighting the Ministry's failure to emphasise this Tatweer component.

As a result, junior teachers across the schools were largely unfamiliar with the potential of Tatweer and how the programme could support their professional and personal

development. Many junior teachers from schools A (Tatweer) and B (non-Tatweer) admitted they were unfamiliar with the Tatweer programme or provided conflicting and imprecise information about its scope and objectives. Indeed, many participants in both schools who participated in the program and those who did not were unaware of the Tatweer program and the opportunities it provides for their professional development.

The structural deficiencies of the Tatweer agenda

The Tatweer agenda is perceived to lack sufficient financial resources dedicated to training and leadership capacity-building, and there was a notable lack of courses suitable for teachers. The rigorous selection criteria for participation also encouraged schools to under-report their current training needs, as acknowledging school flaws was perceived to be a barrier for programme entry, as the evidence from school D indicates.

Tatweer allowed open collaboration and exchange of ideas both within schools and between the participating schools so aspiring school leaders could learn from those who had more leadership experience and could become role models to serve as their inspiration. However, the findings indicate a general reluctance among teachers to participate in a programme that is perceived to increase their workload without helping them to develop competencies that could be directly applied in practice. Principals and senior teachers from the schools participating in Tatweer (schools D and A) were also not convinced that the Western basis of the programme was fit for the Saudi Arabian context. While it was acknowledged that the Tatweer programme draws on Western practices for leadership development, some of the initiatives were perceived to require substantial adaptations to meet local needs and demands. However, the main barrier to the programme's success seems to be its selectivity, as participants from the non-Tatweer group reported reluctance to accept the administrative burden of applying to Tatweer if the chance of being accepted was low.

The participants, especially junior teachers in schools B and C, criticised the Tatweer programme's selectivity, as it was perceived to create a two-tier education system, contrary to the Ministry of Education's stated objective to create equal opportunities for each child. The level of control that the Ministry of Education exercised over the schools participating in the programme was another aspect that limited the programme's

effectiveness, according to participants from school D, as it was perceived that schools should have been given greater scope to develop their own ideas focused on the specific needs of the schools and their students.

Despite its potential to contribute to a meaningful transformation of the leadership programmes in schools, the Tatweer programme may have missed the opportunity to market the initiatives for leadership development among the case schools that participated in the programme and those that remained outside it.

Research Question 5: What are the barriers facing leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia

Leadership development has been on the agenda of the schools and the Ministry of Education as the policy-makers mentioned numerous initiatives that were conducted to develop the leadership capabilities of those who participated in the programmes. However, current and prospective school leaders face several barriers in their journey towards leadership. Those barriers can be grouped into four categories: personal and job-specific, school-specific, institutional, and programme-specific.

Personal and Job-Specific

The most significant barriers to leadership development were personal, as school leadership was not perceived as a desired career path, especially by junior participants. There was a lack of interest in leadership development for both senior and junior teachers in schools B and D because participants did not see themselves as school principals and because the negative aspects of the job were perceived to outweigh the positive ones. Junior teachers from all schools (mostly schools A and B) lacked a clear understanding of the leadership role and were concerned about the extra workload if they became leaders. Principals in schools A and C lamented that teachers were reluctant to assume new responsibilities and that finding good and motivated teachers was challenging in the contemporary job market. School leadership was also perceived by junior teachers in schools B and C to be tedious, while senior teachers across all schools complained that school leadership requires them to assume new

responsibilities on top of their perceived heavy workload. This provides a barrier towards accessing leadership development programmes.

Job-specific barriers included the perception that the job demands for school leadership were substantial. Principals in all schools lamented their increasing administrative and managerial responsibilities and inadequate preparation for the position before they assumed it. Principals in schools A and B were vocal that the Ministry of Education had created unnecessary administrative hurdles that diverted their attention from more important matters, which also provided a disincentive to assume leadership roles. Many participants believe that school leadership is an administrative role and assuming a leadership position would require them to engage with tedious, secretarial, tasks they would prefer avoiding.

What further discourages teachers from pursuing a leadership position is the perceived substantial increase in stress levels, which increases the pressure to perform among senior teachers and adversely impacts their quality of life. Participants in Tatweer and non-Tatweer schools perceived that leadership also requires them to assume new administrative responsibilities. Junior teachers in school D were reluctant to take on new responsibilities as the teaching job was perceived to include substantial administrative requirements, making them unwilling to take on more responsibilities.

Participants were also discouraged by a perceived lack of proper incentives, as senior teachers and principals of School B and School D considered that the salary increase and other perks that school leaders obtain are inadequate to compensate for the increase in job responsibilities. School C participants claimed they lacked job security and career incentives, leading some junior teachers to leave the profession, while those from School B complained about insufficient training opportunities and overcrowded classrooms.

School Specific

Among the school-specific factors seen as barriers to leadership development were the perceived weak school culture and the authoritarian leadership style in some schools. Teachers in schools A and D lamented their experiences of poor leadership (either in

their current or past workplace), while the perceived authoritarian leadership style of the school B principal demotivated the participants. Such participants also noted the frequent tensions with the administration and how the school leaders gave them insufficient room to realise their potential. In school D, for example, the selection process for leadership positions was flawed as favouritism was perceived to affect the promotion process, discouraging the self-development of senior and junior teachers.

Institutional

The perceived institutional barriers to leadership development highlighted the Ministry of Education's inadequate role in training. A senior teacher from school A said that the only way to develop leadership capacities is by taking courses from the Ministry of Education. However, my findings indicated that there are other paths towards leadership development, but the research found that the Ministry is perceived not to provide sufficient institutional support to encourage leadership development. The lack of institutional support was felt more profoundly for the non-Tatweer schools B and C, where senior teachers and principals disagreed with the Ministry's leadership style and considered it to be more authoritarian. Meanwhile, participants from school D complained that constructive dialogue with the Ministry is lacking, while the breakdown of communication was attributed to the authoritarian approach of the Ministry by participants in three of the four schools.

Both senior and junior teachers claimed that the Ministry imposes cumbersome processes and procedures, conducts programmes for leadership development without obtaining sufficient feedback from the participants themselves, and that such inflexible approaches discourage teachers from participating in such programmes. The perceived breakdown of communication between the schools and the Ministry was also reported by participants from the policy-making group, who complained that they did not receive sufficient feedback from the different stakeholders to enable them to modify the current programmes and curricula for teachers' development, while the teachers noted that their feedback and criticism was not acted on by policymakers.

Programme specific

The programme-specific barriers to leadership development were mostly noted by the participants from the policymakers' group. They complained that the current leadership development programmes follow a piecemeal approach and are in different stages of development across the schools. They claimed that there is no structured and centralised programme for leadership development, perhaps explaining why most participants relied on self-development and ad hoc opportunities to enhance their skills and competencies. The policymakers also recognised that the institutions conducting leadership development programmes had not been adequately assessed, and participants' feedback on the programmes was difficult to obtain. However, the teachers in different schools complained that the selection criteria for the leadership development programmes were not transparent, which led to the exclusion of some participants who needed such training, as also noted by the principal of school D. The programmes currently conducted were perceived not to be always relevant to the needs of teachers, as participants from school C complained about the lack of effective cross-cultural training, which would have enabled them to manage the diversity challenges in the classroom.

Addressing the five barriers mentioned above would be an important step towards improving the leadership development programmes and motivating participants' interest in professional development.

Contextual Significance

Hallinger (2018) stresses the significance of context in influencing leadership behaviours, notably the institutional, community, national, cultural, and economic contexts. As previous research has shown (Algarni and Male, 2015; Alhuzaim et al., 2022; Abu Alsuood and Youde, 2018), institutional context and the level of centralisation of the educational system substantially constrain leadership practice. The dominant understanding is that the Saudi educational system is heavily centralised as the Ministry of Education limits the autonomy of school principals and individual teachers (Algarni and Male 2015; Abdulaziz et al. 2021; Mathis 2010). While Algarni and Male (2015) argue that the primary mechanism for improving educational excellence in Saudi schools will be through devolution of decision-making, no previous study has shown

how Saudi schools are becoming agents in their own professional development. The main contextual contribution of this research is to demonstrate that some decentralisation in Saudi Arabian schools is indeed taking place, with schools and individual teachers taking the initiative to develop strategies and plans for developing an agenda for leadership development. While the Saudi school system remains strongly centralised, as the Ministry of Education continues to be responsible for leadership development curriculum and practice, the findings show that schools and teachers are gradually assuming a degree of agency for leadership development, especially in the areas where they receive no support from the Ministry.

Alyami (2016) argues that the Tatweer Programme has brought semi-decentralisation in Saudi Arabian schools, but this study has shown that school-led leadership development projects are equally successful in both Tatweer and non-Tatweer schools. The trends observed in this study are consistent with those of Alhuzaim et al. (2022), who also indicate that the Saudi educational system is moving away from leadership styles and practices commonly found in centralised educational systems by embracing transformational leadership models. However, this research has provided a critical evaluation of the current leadership development strategies used in Saudi Arabia, which was not previously addressed in any other study. The research has demonstrated that the current formal training for leadership development is perceived to be superficial and generic, with some teachers feeling that the current opportunities do not meet their training needs. The principals of the case study schools admitted that they had not undertaken specific training before assuming headship. While the gaps in the preparation of Saudi principals have been identified before (e.g. Almudarra, 2017), this study was the first to focus on the barriers principals perceive in becoming good leaders.

The literature on school leadership in the Gulf is limited, and that on school leadership development is even more scarce, as no previous study shows what courses, programmes, and initiatives are available to Saudi Arabian educational leaders (Hammad et al., 2023b; Hammad & Alazmi, 2020; Karami-Akkary & Hammad, 2019). Most studies examine current initiatives in the Saudi higher education system (e.g. Al-

Swaillem & Elliott, 2013; Khathlan, 2010) or the specific leadership styles practised by educational leaders (Alazmi & Al-Mahdy 2020; Alnasser, 2019; Abdulaziz et al., 2021).

Previous research has acknowledged the specific challenges Saudi Arabian leaders face (Algarni & Male, 2015; Hammad & Shah, 2019) and the need for introducing new leadership practices in Saudi schools (Alameen et al., 2015) but that research has not paid sufficient attention to the strategies for leadership development in the Saudi context. My study has demonstrated the formal and informal channels through which Saudi Arabian school leaders tried to develop their competencies and the specific role of self-development in facilitating leadership development.

Some studies examining leadership development in the Gulf context equate school leadership with headship and look only at the initiatives that school principals undertake before or after assuming office (Badawood, 2003; Alazmi & Al-Mahdy, 2020). Such accounts do not consider that contemporary Saudi classrooms require capable educational leaders to support the broader objective of Saudi Vision 2030. This thesis discusses the leadership development initiatives available for principals, other leaders and teachers in Najran. It shows the complexity of leadership-building initiatives in the Saudi context, and, in this respect, it differs from the study of AlKarni (2009), which only examined the leadership development opportunities available for young principals.

Previous research recognises the potential of the Tatweer programme in addressing the structural limitations of the Saudi Arabian educational system and how it supports technological innovation and entrepreneurship (Tayan, 2017). Researchers recognised that the success of the Tatweer programme depends on having "qualified, high-quality, effective school leadership" (Khalil & Karim 2016, p. 506). However, my study is the first to evaluate the role of the Tatweer programme in reshaping the school leadership development programmes in Saudi Arabia. Most previous studies focused on exploring how the Tatweer programme has facilitated the emergence of new technologically-driven classrooms (Alyami, 2014; Alyami, 2016; Alturkostany & Iinuma, 2018) rather than addressing Tatweer's leadership development initiatives. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first research that provides a critical account of the leadership development component of Tatweer by highlighting the challenges the programme has

faced concerning participants and school selection. Compared with the previous research (Alyami & Floyd, 2019) that evaluates the leadership development practices in the Tatweer schools, this study offers a structured comparison between the available programmes, initiatives and opportunities conducted in Tatweer and non-Tatweer schools.

This study provides a valuable contribution to regional and international research on leadership preparation in secondary schools. Given the knowledge gaps concerning leadership development across the wider Arab region (Hammad et al., 2023b; Karami-Akkary and Hammad, 2019), the study provides useful insights into how countries with educational settings similar to Saudi Arabia might boost their educators' leadership capacity. It also serves as a counterbalance to challenge the dominance of Western-based research on educational leadership (Hammad & Alazmi, 2020; Hammad & Al-Harthi, 2021). At the same time, the study enriches international research and practice by offering an insightful analysis of the challenges and paradoxes that centralised educational systems face in regard to leadership preparation. It also identifies educators' aspirations and ambitions regarding leadership self-development, which could be used as the driving factors for designing more meaningful and valuable training opportunities.

Methodological significance

This study differs significantly from previous research on leadership and leadership development in Saudi Arabia, using different methods, sampling frames, and data collection and analysis strategies. Almudarra (2017), Alnasser (2019), Tayan (2019), Khalil and Karim (2016) Algarni and Male (2015) all use narrative literature reviews or systematic reviews. Those studies did not collect any primary data through which their conclusions can be validated. My study has used primary qualitative data obtained through interviews to investigate leadership development policy and practice in Saudi Arabia. It differs from the studies cited above as it is based on empirical data that show how school leaders perceive their leadership development.

In addition to narrative reviews, the literature on school leadership in Saudi Arabia tends to utilise either quantitative methods (Badawood, 2003) or mixed methods (AlKarni,

2009; Almannie, 2015) designs that do not allow sufficient space for in-depth enquiries. This is in contrast to international research, which is more focused on unmasking individual experiences through qualitative inquiries (Cruz-González et al., 2020; Sahlin, 2023). The only study that used qualitative methods to investigate leadership development in Saudi Arabia was by Alogali (2018), who focused only on the small number of teachers who have completed the Oxford Leadership Programme. My study has bridged this gap by supplementing the existing literature with qualitative data offering participant perspectives.

This study adopts a multiple case study design by focusing on leadership development in four schools for boys in Najran, Saudi Arabia. The case selection is notably different from past research on the topic because it focuses on public schools in Saudi Arabia rather than the international schools researched by Hammad and Shah (2019) and Alhudith (2020). The multiple case study design also helped me uncover cross-school differences in leadership development practices. In contrast, AlKarni (2009), Alhuzaim et al. (2022), and Meemar (2014) relied upon survey research aggregating data from school principals, where school differences could not be identified.

Another distinctive feature of my research is that I focus on four schools for boys, while Mathis (2010) and Alyami and Floyd (2019) explore the school leadership development practices in girls' schools. The only research conducted in the past fifteen years that appraises leadership development challenges in Saudi boys' schools are those of AlKarni (2009), Alsharari (2010) and Badawood (2003). However, their research is outdated, while my study provides new insights.

In addition to using a multi-case study design, this study is multi-perspective, with data collected from three stakeholder groups: teachers (junior and senior), principals, and policy-makers. Previous research adopted a narrower approach. AlKarni (2009) interviewed ten principals; Meemar (2014) surveyed 173 principals from the schools participating in the Tatweer programme, while Mathis (2010) interviewed 12 female principals from the Tatweer programme. Only Alyami (2016) focused on the experiences of both teachers and principals, but that study only addressed the Tatweer programme, and non-Tatweer schools were not included in the research. Analysing the

perspectives of junior and senior teachers (which was accomplished within this study) is important to understand why so few teachers engage meaningfully with the available training opportunities. It thus helps to address the knowledge gaps identified across the Arab region in previously published reviews (Hammad et al., 2023b; Karami-Akkary and Hammad, 2019).

My study is also distinctive in including policy-makers' perspectives on school leadership development. The only previous study to examine the views of Ministry of Education employees was by Alogali (2018). However, this study focused narrowly on a single programme for leadership development. By including policy-makers, training managers, teachers and principals, I was able to triangulate diverse perspectives on leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia, an approach that no other study has attempted.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The research findings provide insights into how leadership development programmes for teachers in Saudi Arabia could be revised to meet participants' training needs more effectively. Five implications are discussed below.

First, policy-makers and principals (both of Tatweer and non-Tatweer schools) should consider how they can popularise the current opportunities for leadership development among the teacher body. This study's results indicate that many teachers are unaware of the opportunities for professional development and that some are even confused about what programmes such as Tatweer are supposed to achieve. Increasing the awareness among junior and senior teachers is also likely to spur their interest and help training managers identify training needs that are not currently covered. Possible strategies that can be used include organising professional development days and seminars in the schools and creating online resources for the popularisation of Tatweer and other school leadership development programmes. Involving teachers in co-designing and delivering leadership development courses will create opportunities for teachers' engagement with the leadership development curriculum, enhancing the outreach of such programmes. The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education also needs to popularise international school development programmes and work collaboratively with

international think tanks to ensure such programmes are available to teachers outside Riyadh. As this research has shown, one of the reasons why some teachers refuse to participate in leadership development training is because they perceive that the available training opportunities do not meet their training requirements. This indicates the need for the Ministry of Education to commission an evaluation of the current training initiatives and obtain feedback from teachers and principals before updating its leadership development curriculum.

Second, the Saudi Ministry of Education and school principals should develop strategies for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for those teachers who participate in leadership development courses. Those can include performance-based incentives, salary increases, and recognition programmes that could ensure that teachers derive personal benefits for the time and investment they have spent participating in leadership development courses. As the findings indicate, many teachers do not plan to stay at their jobs for the long term, so ensuring that higher-ranking roles and promotion opportunities are available to teachers who engage in leadership training is also a path towards maintaining qualified personnel in the education system. Requiring aspiring principals to complete the Ministry of Education certified leadership training programmes should help to ensure that the appointed principals have the relevant training and qualifications to be successful at their jobs and to provide a merit-based path to promotion. Having clear requirements for principal appointments should also help to alleviate the perceived nepotism and patronage in the Saudi educational system and the accusation that some participants are deliberately excluded from career advancement.

Third, the Saudi Ministry of Education should provide dedicated budgets to schools for teachers' professional development. Such grants may enable principals and teachers to find training that matches their training needs and also help the schools develop a culture that fosters continuous learning. As the findings indicate, school-led programmes for skill development are gaining traction in Saudi Arabia, but those initiatives require funding to make a significant contribution to school leadership development.

Fourth, the leadership development curricula should ensure that sufficient attention is given to developing participants' soft skills. This study indicates that participants are dissatisfied that the current initiatives do not help them to develop their problem-solving, conflict resolution and effective communication skills. The research has shown that the training courses for aspiring leaders in Saudi Arabia are either focused on pedagogy or on the administrative aspects of school management. Training programmes should be updated with courses focusing on personnel management, technology, public relations, human resource management, change management, and resource management to address perceived training needs. Training managers should also respond to the perception that the current provision is over-theoretical by combining theoretical and practical content in an interactive manner rather than relying only on theory. Furthermore, principals must be incentivised to enhance the organisational capacities of their own schools by distributing leadership and working collaboratively with their colleagues to enhance teachers' skills and build leadership from the bottom up. There is a growing recognition in the literature that principals who use instructional leadership are able to incentivise teachers to try their own initiatives and create an atmosphere where more and more teachers become engaged in leadership practice (Hallinger, 2005; McEwan, 2002).

Fifth, this study provides evidence that the leadership development component of the Tatweer programme does not have the same weight and impact in schools as the other Tatweer initiatives, such as technological integration, infrastructure enhancement, and curricular development. Splitting up Tatweer into several programmes, each with a separate budget, personnel and resources, would help the Ministry of Education to develop more focused initiatives for leadership development. There is also some evidence that the Tatweer budget is mostly spent on technology, and differentiation between Tatweer initiatives can help to ensure that enough resources are spent on teachers' training and leadership courses.

Future Research

While this study aimed to provide a multi-case study and multi-perspective account of the approaches used in Najran, Saudi Arabia, for developing leaders in schools, it

should be supplemented by additional research to validate its conclusions and improve the generalisability of the research findings. Similar multi-case study analyses could be conducted in private and international schools in other regions in Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, Ash Sharqiyah, Qassim, Asir, Hail, Tabuk, Al Hudud ash Shamaliyah, Jazan, Al Bahah, to identify what practices are used for school leadership development there. Such research would be able to address whether schools enjoying greater autonomy in organising their own training programmes make use of this independence and how specifically their leadership development practices differ from those of public schools. An interesting avenue for further investigation could involve comparing the leadership development curriculum in Najran with those in use in other regions with greater sociocultural diversity to uncover potential variations in approaches, effectiveness, and contextual factors influencing leadership development practice. Such a comparative analysis has the potential to provide insights into the respective strengths and weaknesses of different strategies used throughout the country and to facilitate the development of leadership programmes that build on good practice throughout the country.

The present study has focused on examining how teachers in Saudi Arabian schools for boys build their leadership competencies. However, due to the gender-segregated nature of the Saudi educational system, the conclusions of the study cannot be generalised. Further interview-based research would be helpful to examine the processes, content and outcomes of leadership development of Saudi Arabian female teachers. Further studies with policy-makers are also necessary to examine in what way the available programmes and training opportunities for female teachers differ from those available to their male counterparts and what the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education is doing to equalise opportunities for different genders. One of the key objectives of both Vision 2030 and the Tatweer programme was to address the gaps in the preparation of female teachers, but further analysis is necessary to examine whether the emerging training programme for female educational leaders is pedagogically sound, addresses current training needs, and prepares the participants sufficiently for the demands of the

The results obtained for this study should be validated through large-scale survey-based research with both teachers and principals to enhance the generalizability of the conclusions. Such survey-based research could target those who have recently completed the Ministry training to examine whether and how it has contributed to participants' personal growth.

A research gap that remains unaddressed is how teachers in Saudi international schools build their leadership capacities since most of them do not know Arabic and are excluded from the training courses provided by the Ministry of Education. Interview-based research could examine whether those teachers have sufficient opportunities for leadership development, what is their attitude towards self-development, and in what way the Saudi Ministry of Education supports (or fails to support) the capacity building of international teachers. A few programmes are available for international teachers, such as International Baccalaureate (IB) Educator Certificates and Programmes, the Oxford Programme for Educational Leaders and the COBIS Leadership Programme. However, further analysis of those programmes' outcomes is needed as to whether such programmes can build the leadership competencies required in the Saudi context.

Overview

The present project has the ambitious objective of providing a critical assessment of the leadership development initiatives available to junior and senior teachers in Najran, Saudi Arabia, while also exploring the policy-makers' perspectives on how those initiatives are being developed. The results have shown that, despite the efforts to create and promote leadership development initiatives, most participants consider self-development to be the primary driver for personal development. The research also shows that the Ministry's efforts to introduce leadership development training as part of the Tatweer programme are mostly ineffective, as the programme lacks the outreach and impacts its creators had hoped to achieve. However, the findings show a number of positive trends, notably the autonomy teachers and principals have in developing their own interventions. The research has demonstrated the significance of the programmes conducted by the Ministry, and of school-based and self-based. The findings also show the barriers that the Ministry of Education should address to develop more effective

leadership education programmes. The research has both contextual and methodological significance, as it was able to present the content and process of school leadership development based upon policy-maker and participant perspectives.

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Appendix One: Ethical approval



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18/03/2021

Our Ref: 2020/41

Dear Zayed Alziyadi

Thank you for your resubmitted research ethics application for your project:

School Leadership Development in Saudi Arabia: Policy-Makers' and Participants' Perspectives

Following confirmation you will make the minor amendments we raised in a letter dated 17.02.21, your research is now:

- **Approved**

Please ensure you:

- Tidy up the consent form (e.g. box size to be consistent)
- Delete data from your phone once it has been uploaded to One Drive

For a discussion of issues involved in conducting research interviews securely online, see <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/digitalresearch/2021/02/25/conducting-research-interviews-online/>.

This research is approved provided it is completed by January 2024.

If your research overruns this date, please contact the Ethics Team to arrange an extension and update on any additions/changes to your work.

We wish you well with your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kay Fuller'.

Dr Kay Fuller
Chair of the Ethics Committee

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Appendix Two: Interview Guide for School-based Participants

This interview guide will be used for the school-based participants; school heads, senior and junior teachers in five selected schools in Najran. The following interview questions will be asked of these participants:

Research Questions	Interview Question
1. How are school leaders developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	1. How do you define the concept of leadership development? 2. What are the skills and capabilities required by effective school leaders? 3. What issues do you think influence the development of school leaders? 4. How do school leaders develop and grow?
2. What are policy-makers' and participants' perspectives about school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	5. Have you received formal training to become the school leader? If yes, how did such training help to develop you as a school leader? 6. Do you know about 'Tatweer programmes'? If yes, what do you think about the role of 'Tatweer programmes' in developing school leaders? [prompt: how effective are these programmes in developing school leaders?]
3. What is the curriculum for formal leadership development programmes in	7. What was the content of your leadership development programme?

Najran, Saudi Arabia?	
4. How are participants identified for leadership preparation programmes in schools in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	8. How were you chosen to take part in a leadership development programme?
5. How are teachers socialised as school principals in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	<p>9. How have your identity and role changed as a result of your transition from a teacher to a school head [prompt: how, if at all, has this changed your perception about school leadership?]</p> <p>10. How did your relationships with other teachers or leaders contribute to your understanding of leadership?</p> <p>11. How did you acquire familiarity with the culture of your current school?</p>
<p>Overview Question</p> <p>1. How are school leaders developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia?</p> <p>2. What are policy-makers' and participants' perspectives about school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?</p>	<p>12. What are your suggestions to improve school leadership development? [prompt: how do you think your suggestions would improve school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?]</p>

Appendix Three: Interview Guide for Policy-makers

Research Questions	Interview Question
1. How are school leaders developed in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	1. Which are the current arrangements for developing school leaders in Najran, Saudi Arabia?
2. What are policy-makers' and participants' perspectives about school leadership development in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	2. What are the Ministry of Education's policies about school leadership development? [Prompt: How effective are these policies in developing school leaders].
3. What is the curriculum for formal leadership development programmes in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	3. What school leadership development courses are designed and implemented by the Ministry of Education? [Prompt: How effective are these courses in developing school leaders?] 4. What are the components of an effective school leadership development course? 5. How effective is the Education & Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) in developing school leaders in Najran, Saudi Arabia?
4. How are participants identified for leadership preparation programmes in	6. What criteria are used by the Ministry of Education to identify participants for

schools in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	leadership preparation programmes in Najran, Saudi Arabia?
5. How are teachers socialised as school principals in Najran, Saudi Arabia?	<p>7. How does training about the current culture of the school contribute to effective school leadership development courses?</p> <p>8. Which other aspects do you consider important in terms of socialising school leaders? [Prompt: How can mentoring contribute to socialising school leaders?].</p>