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Definitions of educational leadership – Arab educators' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a general overview of how educational leadership is defined by Arab educators and education specialists in the Arab region, concentrating on the State of Qatar. The study builds on insights from socio-cultural theory and critical discourse analysis, viewing language as a social practice and thus treats leadership as a form of discursive practice. The study draws on grounded theory and adopts a socio-cultural perspective employing semi-structured interviews conducted with school principals, teachers, educators, educational leaders, educational researchers, and members of the community in Qatar. The results concluded from this study disclose discording views of educational leadership and how it is defined, owing to borrowing the concept from Western educational system models, either by using these terms verbatim or as they are lost in translation. This discord reflects a lack of clarity in using the relevant educational leadership concepts and has arguably led to differences in educational practices and educators' dispositions and perspectives. Finally, the study concludes with valuable recommendations for educational policy and decision-making and some suggestions for future research.

Introduction

An examination of the major efforts to develop educational systems worldwide, including those in 22 Arab League member states, reveals that policymakers often adapt blueprints based on 'Western' theories of educational leadership with little attention to the cultural fit and contextualization (Alfadala, 2015; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Fadlemula & Koc, 2016). With the growth of research that seeks to analyze educational leadership and management practices in developing societies, past and recent work highlights concern that Western-based theories are flawed when applied in non-Western contexts (Al-Dabbagh & Assaad, 2010; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Hallinger & Hammad, 2017; Hammad & Hallinger, 2017; Karabenick & Moosa, 2005; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Much of this research draws on the assumption that the nature of 'effective leadership and

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management practices' can only be fully understood when examined within the socio-cultural, political, and economic context of the society (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017, p. 435). At this point, it is essential to note that throughout this paper, we acknowledge that the Arab societies are quite diverse and not entirely similar in terms of political, economic, cultural, and social aspects (Oplatka & Arar, 2017).

Developing nations, including Arab and Asia Pacific countries, have a long history of educational research predating the establishment of some Western countries. Nonetheless, research in the realm of education in many of those countries is still primarily limited to the level of practice that is often implemented passively without adequately interrogating the theoretically informed educational leadership concepts and definitions characterizing Western educational systems. Undoubtedly, although much has been written about educational leadership from a Western perspective, research examining how educational leadership is perceived in Arab nations is acutely under-researched (Hallinger & Hammad, 2017). Moreover, to understand educational leadership from the perspectives of Arab educational leaders, it is important to unpack the terminology that forms the foundations of educational leadership in the Arab world as used in academia and by practitioners.

Before attempting to understand how educational leadership is defined and practiced in Arab countries from Arab educators' perspectives, it is important to explore the Arabic terms that constitute educational leadership in Arab countries. Therefore, this study examines how the concept of 'educational leadership' is defined by educators in the Arab world. More specifically, the central focus of this study is on education leaders' perspectives of educational leadership from their Arabic perspective. Investigating educational leadership in a non-Western context is necessary because of the void in the research in this field within the Arab region. Because very little is known about educational leadership in the Arab world, this research seeks to provide some explanatory insights into this area and broaden the current understanding of educational leadership in general. The study aims to paint a picture of Arab educators' understandings of educational leadership and offer an alternative perspective that may bridge the gap in the literature.

This study draws on ground theory and adopts a socio-cultural perspective relying on insights from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and the view of discourse as social practice (Fairclough, 1992, Fairclough, 1995). The study takes the view that leadership is a type of discursive practice that provides a critical analysis of the way participants 'talk-about' their practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This study uses management theory and policy studies as conceptual frameworks and is guided by the existing literature on critical discourse analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Rogers, 2004; Weiss & Wodak, 2007). This allows an examination of who says what, how, and why in line with Lawless, Sambrook, Garavan, and Valentin's (2011) practice approach that treats language as 'situated within a particular social and cultural context rather than within a particular interaction'. (p. 265).

Background

The catalyst for this paper is threefold. First, interest in the topic stemmed from the researchers' conversations and discussions with officials, educators, and policymakers at various educational organizations in Qatar, a country that has over the past two decades

undergone a series of educational reforms recommended by international (mainly Western) organizations commissioned to overhaul the country's national educational system. The researchers' experiences in the field of educational leadership in Qatar, including public and private K-12 school levels through to higher education, sparked their interest in the topic. Second, the inspiration for interest in studying this subject emanated from the lack of published research that sheds light on educational leadership in an Arabian Gulf state context, as was stated above (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017).

Finally, Arab educational leaders' understandings of educational leadership were once again the center of discussion at Educational Leadership Lab using a design-thinking approach. The first Educational Leadership Lab was held in Qatar in 2017 with the participation of 24 attendees from different sectors (educational and training, business and economics, media, medical, and non-governmental organization) and different countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia KSA, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan. The facilitators, including one of the present researchers, asked the attendees to identify the main challenges facing education in the Arab world. More than 30 challenges were identified regarding the curriculum, teachers, and students. However, all agreed that there is a lack of consensus on the meaning of the term 'education' in Arabic. In the light of this background, the central argument persists as to whether it refers to *Tarbiyyah* or *Ta'leem* (often interchangeably translated as 'education').

In Arab and Muslim countries, the two constructs '*Tarbiyyah*'¹ and '*Ta'leem*'² are evident in the educational discourse and are used interchangeably. However, the terms are loaded with particular context-bound meanings. Interestingly, some Arab states brand their ministry of education (both *Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'leem*) while others refer to it as the Ministry of Education (*Ta'leem*). For example, in the State of Qatar, the Arabic version officially used for The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is *Wizaarat at-Ta'leem wa Ta'leem al-'Ali*. The United Arab Emirates uses the Ministry of Education (*Wizaarat at-Tarbiyyah wa Ta'leem*), whereas Saudi Arabia opts for the name The Ministry of Education (*Wizaarat at-Ta'leem*). Table 1 presents the names used for the ministry of education in some Arab states.

This alternate use of names also reflects different uses of titles or labels employed to refer to educators. Thus, teachers are called *Mua'llem* in some contexts but *Murrabi* or *Mudarris* in others. In Tunisia, a distinction is drawn between primary school teachers (*Mudarris*) and secondary teachers (*Ustaz*). Here, it should be noted that reference to Arab countries should be taken with caution as the educational landscape in the region is not uniform since the educational systems in these countries reflect their French or English colonial past (British Council, 2013).

Drawing on the relationship between discourse and culture brings language to the foreground as an integral part of social life and a communicative event (Schwartzman, 1989). As was pointed out by Escobar-Ortloff and Ortloff (2003), 'Culture has

Table 1. Ministry of education (& Higher education) in some Arab states.

Country	Name in English	Name in Arabic
Jordan	The Ministry of Education	Wizaarat at-Tarbiyyah wa Ta'leem
Qatar	The Ministry of Education & Higher Education	Wizaarat at-Ta'leem wa Ta'leem al-'Ali
Saudi Arabia	The Ministry of Education	Wizaarat at-Ta'leem
The United Arab Emirates	The Ministry of Education	Wizaarat at-Tarbiyyah wa Ta'leem

a powerful influence on how and what people think about knowledge, learning, and education' (p. 255). In effect, as Callow (1999) suggested, through language, it is possible to gain access to worldviews, values, and ideologies. For these reasons, studying educational leadership as being situated within a complex array of cultural frames is particularly significant. To attain this goal, this study identifies how school principals, individuals identified here as 'educational leaders', define the concept of 'educational leadership.'

Review of literature

Foucault describes discourse as 'texts and utterances but also as ways of thinking and sense-making and as behaviors, relationships, interactions, and arrangements of signs and material objects. Discourses are not just what is said, but they are also practices' (as cited in Thomson, Hall, & Jones, 2013, p. 3) Since discourses are socially constructed, meaning is always subjective, relational, and contextually bound (Laclau, 1996). More importantly, for this context, Foucault suggests 'it is through discourse or knowledge that our identity and our understandings of the world are shaped. Discourse gains its power through the acceptance of the reality that it presents' (Romanowski & Nasser, 2012, p. 122). Through the inclusion and exclusion of knowledge, values and skills, Western discourses on educational leadership not only constructs; it also legitimizes the theory and practices of educational leaders.

According to Briscoe, Henze, and Arriaza (2009), critical discourse analysis can aid school leaders 'in their effort to understand, at a microlevel, why people relate to each other the ways they do, and to unlock, at a macro level, the ideologies informing school reform and leadership' (p. 2). Indeed, recent and past work shows educational leadership exemplifies a form of discourse practice (Anderson & Mungal, 2015). For example, Torrance's and Humes' (2015) study highlights the mounting emphasis on leadership within educational theory, policy, and practice. The authors built on existing academic scholarship and policy documents to examine the way the discourse of leadership has shifted over the years. They concluded by criticizing the 'lack of conceptual underpinning for that discourse, evident both nationally and internationally, and they identified key issues that the teaching profession has been left to try to understand and make sense of' (Torrance & Humes, 2015, p. 792).

Educational leadership

Various definitions of educational leadership have been developed that include a wide spectrum of knowledge, characteristics, dispositions, and skills containing competing perspectives and understandings with little agreement of what is or should be included in the discipline (Bush, 2007). Beaudoin (2003), for instance, argued that 'leadership speaks to a ubiquitous, identifiable set of human activities that support and assist, particularly in relation to change' (p. 520). Characterized as a 'notoriously perplexing and enigmatic phenomenon' (Allix & Gronn, 2005, p. 181), educational leadership is a construct that means different things to different people (Yukl, 2002). As Timperley (2005) noted, definitions of the term are fraught with arbitrariness and subjectivity, a point succinctly summarized by Allix and Gronn (2005), who remarked that:

Despite a long history of interest and fascination, and a relatively shorter history of systematic investigation, the phenomenon that is referred to as 'leadership' remains in large part a theoretical enigma and paradox ... In recent years, doubts concerning the integrity of the concept have raised the question of whether leadership refers to anything real at all, and whether it is even fruitful to entertain such a notion (pp. 181–182).

Overall, as Stack et al. (2006) stated, "Despite much promotional activity, there is no widely accepted definition of leadership and no consensus on how to best develop it or foster it" noting "disagreement about 'what leadership means and how it is related to management or administration' (p. 31). Added to this, although much work has been done on what educational leaders do, very little is known about the 'how' and 'why' of school leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

Generally, 'different definitions of leadership abound and one central feature that scholars agree upon is that leadership involves the exercise of influence over others. Unlike management, it can take place outside as well as inside of formal organizations' (Christie & Lingard, 2001, p. 3). Although the concept of educational leadership varies across societies and cultures, there is a lack of research exploring the definition of educational leadership and the terminology used to define this concept from an Arab perspective. Even though some educators do acknowledge this fact, many unwittingly adopt 'norm' practices rather than customizing them to their contexts. After all, contextualized culturally sensitive studies of educational leadership are lacking (Escobar-Ortloff & Ortloff, 2003). In the context of the Arab world, the concept of educational leadership and its definition(s) do not necessarily carry the same meaning. In this regard, it is important to stress that Arab countries display great diversity despite a 'common' language, culture, religion, history, and physical and geographic environment. As Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, and Eltaiba (2004) observe, 'Arab societies are highly diverse and consist of heterogeneous systems of social differentiation based on ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, familial, tribal, regional, socioeconomic, and national identities' (p. 103). To illustrate, some studies link *Tarbiyyah* to Islamic education in particular. For example, *Tarbiyyah* is associated with an understanding of human growth, as was pointed out by Ahmed (2012). *Tarbiyyah* is identified as 'a complex synthesis of moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social development, understood in relation to the primary aim of Islamic education toward *Tawhid* or oneness with God both in this world and beyond death' (Islamic Studies Resources, n.d). Central to the notion of *Tarbiyyah*, for Arabs, is human responsibility to seek knowledge and embed human values and ideals. Intellectual knowledge (*Ta'leem*) is acquired not only through *Tarbiyyah*; people also actively participate in its development and are thereby transformed morally, spiritually, intellectually, and socially (Pedder, 2016).

While studies on educational leadership are increasing in Arab societies, some limitations are worth highlighting. One limitation concerns the fact that Arabs have a history of education that is very different from the concept currently used and known as *Tarbiyyah* (Paramboor & Ibrahim, 2013), as can well be seen in the different names used for the ministries of education in Arab countries, as was indicated above. Generally speaking, the use of different terms and definitions used interchangeably by Arabs to refer to education and educational leadership has resulted in a conceptual and theoretical confusion as well as concomitant educational practices.

Policy borrowing, indigenization, and educational leadership

Globalization has provided opportunities for governments worldwide to borrow educational theories, policies, and practices anticipating an improvement in their educational system (Romanowski, Alkhateeb, & Nasser, 2018). The literature on educational policy borrowing employs a collection of broad descriptors such as “copying”, ‘appropriation’, ‘assimilation’, ‘transfer’, and ‘importation’ (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, p. 451). For this paper, the term borrowing’ is used to refer to the process whereby countries borrow educational policies and practices ‘originally developed and operated, and which appeared to be effective, in a very different cultural context to that of their own societies’ (Nguyena, Elliottb, Terlouw, & Pilota, 2009, p. 109). The borrowing of these policies is often based on the assumption that Western forms of knowledge are considered superior to indigenous forms of knowledge (Wiseman, Alromi, & Alshumrani, 2014). Nations, therefore, incorporate borrowed knowledge to solve existing or emerging problems and improve the educational system (Ellili-Cherif, Romanowski, & Nasser, 2012; Phillips & Ochs, 2003).

There are sound justifications for combining various theories and concepts from different educational systems in an effort to improve education. However, following Burdett and O’Donnell (2016), to learn from examples of different other countries, it is important to ‘ensure that we understand what happens at each step in the transference of a particular policy idea from one context another’ (p. 113).

Still, policymakers often neglect to examine particular aspects of the culture and heritage of the originating country and the appropriateness of the policies to their particular cultural context (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Hence, the borrowing process implicitly promotes ‘de-territorialization and de-contextualization of reform and challenges the past conception of education as a culturally bounded system’ (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p. 5). The result is educational policymakers adopting blueprints of leadership practices and giving little consideration to their cultural fit (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; McDonald, 2012)

Concerning the borrowing of educational leadership theories and practices in the Gulf Council Countries, over the past decade, there has been an increase in public, private, and nonprofit leadership programs demonstrating the importance of leadership development in the Arab world (Al-Dabbagh & Assaad, 2010). As was mentioned above, this increase in leadership programs is that the majority of these programs are a result of educational borrowing where educational programs are imported, often lacking any thought regarding the particular cultural context (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). More importantly, Dimmock and Walker (2000) suggests that concepts, theories, and practices in education are predominantly ethnocentric, embedded in Western philosophy and values. For example, considering the leadership programs developed in the United Arab Emirates, Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010) stated, the:

[...] various theoretical lenses that have been adapted to leadership development programs in the Arab world share the common process of “importing” leadership paradigms from (mostly) Western scholarship and practice. While there are few exceptions to this rule, most of the programs that are “tailor-made” to the needs of the region are, in fact, modeled after existing programs and paradigms, mainly in the US and Europe. (p. 3)

Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010) suggested that educational leaders and educators are strongly influenced by a Western understanding of educational leadership, often

overshadowing their Arab perspective and understanding of educational leadership. The issue these leadership programs face pertains to ‘the tension between dominant “Western” perspectives on leadership and “local” needs and realities’ (Al-Dabbagh & Assaad, 2010, p. 11). These programs present ‘cultural transformations and exchanges that challenge traditional values and norms’ (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 12). More importantly, educational borrowing entails a process of decontextualization that involves ‘a model, practice, or discourse [that] is transplanted from its original context and applied to a new one, the process of recontextualization, ‘indigenization’ or local adaptation, will become key for understanding the educational transfer process’ (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000, p. 275). This process often branded colonization, implies the local or ‘indigenous’ is threatened by the slow eradication of the collective memory of the community and nation and the cultural norms (Al-Tikriti, 2010).

However, Hallinger and Hammad (2017) suggest that the past two decades have witnessed a growing concern for the indigenization of borrowed theories and practices and a questioning of the hegemony and viability of Western perspectives on leadership and management. The result is a dramatic increase in scholarship originating from developing countries that particularizes the significance of cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts of societies and how these shape school leadership and management (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013; Oplatka & Arar, 2017). The notions behind this emerging research is the realization that the universality of the educational leadership and management knowledge base is limited (Hallinger & Hammad, 2017; Oplatka & Arar, 2017) and that the context of the society must be considered when developing and implementing leadership and management practices (Hallinger & Hammad, 2017; Mertkan, Arsan, Inal Cavlan, & Onurkan Aliusta, 2017). More specifically, in the Arab World, scholars in non-Muslim contexts have developed the current theories and practices of educational leadership. Hammad and Hallinger (2017) suggest that a critical mass of scholars are beginning to study educational leadership and management ‘outside of traditional Anglo-American centers of management scholarship’ (p. 435), generating indigenous models of leadership and management (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017).

Therefore, it is vital to understand how indigenization is important, though often overlooked, aspect of educational borrowing. Indigenization integrates indigenous ways of knowing and doing and culture; it also emphasizes the validity of indigenous world-views, knowledge, and perspectives (Hart, 2010; Simpson, 2001; Watkins, 2017). This demands that opportunities are provided for indigeneity to be expressed. In the context of the discourse of educational leadership, it is important to consider indigenous Arabic terms for education and leadership, noting the similarities and differences from Western discourse while avoiding the frequently made assumption that meanings are the same. We must acknowledge that there is no homogenous definition and understanding of educational leadership and that each indigenous nation or community will have their own views and understandings.

Research problem/questions

This paper examines the perspectives of school principals and educational leaders holding positions in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) in Qatar in

order to gain an understanding of the concept of educational leadership and construct an indigenous Arab perspective. The objectives of guiding this study are as follows:

- (1) Explore educational leaders' perspectives on the meaning of Educational leadership in Arabic (*Tarbiyyah* and *Ta'leem*).
- (2) Identify educational leaders' expectations based on both terms *Ta'leem* and *Tarbiyyah*.

Research methods and design

Sampling

Participants' were selected using a purposive sampling where there is a deliberate choice of the informants based upon the qualities or knowledge the informant possesses (Bernard, 2002). In this context, the researchers sought out those individuals who could provide knowledge, experiences, and insight into the definition of educational leadership from an Arab perspective. This nonrandom sampling technique does not need a set number of informants, but rather, the researchers make decisions regarding what needs to be known from the informants and seeks to find individuals who can provide that knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002). Table 2 demonstrates the specifics of the participants in this study.

Semi-structured interviews

Guided by an interpretive paradigm, this study examines an occurrence from the participants' viewpoint and experience taken at face value (Van Esch & Van Esch, 2013). Beatty and Willis (2007) suggest that the goal of qualitative research is to investigate a phenomenon from the perspectives of those with this experience, and interviewing is an appropriate data collection tool to gain access to these perspectives. Since the input from Arab educational leaders is valuable in understanding the concept and practice of educational leadership, interviews were employed as an effective research tool to hear the voices of those who can provide insights. Since the goal of this phenomenological study is to explain the participant's meanings and experiences based on their own words, interviewing can be used to access these perspectives (Kvale, 2006). Therefore, the research method used in this study was semi-structured interviews

Table 2. Participant information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Qualifications	Years of experience	Current Position
Sara	F	BA Science	18	Principal- Primary boys school
Aisha	F	BA Science	13	Principal Secondary girls school
Asma	F	BA Education	25	Principal – primary girls
Hafsa	F	BA Education	38	Principal- complex school KG-year 12
Leena	F	BA Islamic studies	18	Principal Primary boys schools
Zainab	F	PhD Education	10	MOEHE
Fatima	F	BA	20	MOEHE
Noora	F	BA science	34	MOEHE
Mohammad	M	PHD Education	15	MOEHE
Ahmed	M	PhD Islamic law	20	CEO educational center
Saif	M	BA Education	28	Principal Secondary

conducted with school principals, teachers, educators, educational leaders, educational researchers, and members of the community.

An initial interview guide was developed based on the research objectives. The four researchers discussed the research objectives and developed several questions that would be used in the interviews. In order to validate and test the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study involved three face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This aided in testing the interview questions and receive direct feedback from educators. Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to address the study's objectives and all interviews were implemented face-to-face, semi-structured interview protocols were used to conduct the interviews. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, and all except one were audio recorded after participants were informed about the ethical code and procedure under which the study operates. Interview recordings were transcribed for analysis, and the average interview time was 45 min.

Data analysis

In analyzing the interviews, the researchers' goal was to construct meanings and understandings as they emerge during the analysis of the interview data. For purposes of this study, transcripts were first developed from the interviews and then read for understanding and clarity. During the second reading, the researchers employed content analysis to establish the existence and frequency of various themes. Initial emerging patterns were coded and organized, so that they could facilitate the identification of overarching themes and patterns. All data were coded and organized into meaningful themes, and patterns, relevant quotes as well as examples, were integrated into various themes in order to support or contest some findings.

Results

As was said previously, this study is situated in the nexus and intersection of discourse and culture. The analysis below treats interview data as functional and intentionally crafted language that serves to transmit values and ideologies, i.e. as cultural sites (Anstey & Bull, 2009). Drawing on the relationship between discourse and culture, this study argues that through (spoken) language, it is possible to access worldviews, values, and ideologies (Callow, 1999). In effect, the premise espoused in this research is that spoken texts can be interpreted to disclose social and cultural information. In the words of (Gee, 2007), discourses are 'ways of being "people like us". They are "ways of being in the world"; they are "forms of life"; they are socially situated identities. They are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of social histories'. (p. 3). The results of this study are presented in two sections: (a) Meaning of educational terms in Arabic and (b) Education: *Ta'leem or Tarbiyyah?* Each addresses a research objective by providing the major themes that the data generated.

Meaning of educational terms in Arabic

The analysis of the data reveals consistent and persistent confusion regarding how the terms *Mu'allim* (teacher), *Mudarris* (instructor), *Murabbi* (educator), and *Ustaz*

(professor) are defined and understood by interviewees. This reflects a general lack of consensus. The claims that emerged from the interviews generally demonstrated a lack of clear understanding concerning what these terms refer to. For instance, eight interviewees stated they did not know the differences between the four terms but assumed the terms mean different things. Two interviewees, however, suggested that there is no difference, and one suggested that having these terms may lead to a ranking and this may affect their performance. In Ahmed's words, 'Understanding the terms is very important. The terminology may require an international ranking, for teachers, *Ustaz* and *Mudarris*. Dropping the term is very dangerous as it will be forgotten and will not be present in educational practices after a while.'

Accounts by five participants demonstrated that *Murabbi* is understood as a comprehensive term for an educator, and *Mu'allim* is as part of it. Other accounts by four other interviewees suggested the opposite, namely that *Mu'allim* encompasses *Murabbi*. The following quotes demonstrate these contradictory perspectives. For Aisha, a *Mu'allim* is a role model who instills values as a teacher. She elaborated, saying

The *Mu'allim* in the field of education needs to strive to be closer to perfection." Upon reflecting on the meaning of *Murabbi*, Aisha said he/she "instills values and promotes the concepts of Islam ... connects religion to life and morality.

Ahmed echoes a similar perspective arguing that *Mu'allim* solely transmits knowledge to learners and serves as a 'mediator between student's mind and heart' whereas, a *Murabbi* takes 'full responsibility of education, knowledge and the vision of building students' character'. He acknowledged that although these kinds of *Murabbi* still exist in some schools, they are very rare in the education system these days.

Saif resonated similar thoughts claiming a *Mu'allim* (teacher) is a moderator who enhances students' learning experiences adding that *Mu'allim* is merely a term used in writing to refer to a teacher. However, in practice, one uses the term *Ustaz* to address teachers, 'because our society gives more value to the title *Ustaz*.' As he put it, *Murabbi* is an umbrella term that encompasses a *Mu'allim* (teacher) asserting that *Murabbi* is a person who has vast knowledge about different aspects of behavior management. Saif further argued that the educational system ought to have *Murabbi*es as educators, especially at elementary schooling levels, because students' foundational skills, in his view, begin at an early age.

The following analogy was provided by Fatima, who expressed her thoughts saying:

Mu'allim (teacher) is like an engine for *Ta'leem* (education). It directs *Ta'leem* either to the right or to the wrong outcomes. To me, *Mu'allim* is the person who translates or implements educational goals and is responsible for every educational outcome.

Murabbi, in Fatima's opinion, is an educator

who raises generations [He] is a teacher who can influence students' orientation and behaviors? Back in my days, we had teachers who were educators, *Mu'allim Tarbawiyi*. For example, even if one is a science teacher, one will deeply care about raising us as she/he sees *Tarbiyyah* is vital.

Dissimilarly, four leaders claimed that *Mu'allim* is an overarching term that encompasses *Murabbi*, a point Sara reiterated, explaining that *Murabbi* is a teacher who 'reaches the students from within ... helps them in discovering their abilities'. For her, *Murabbi* has to

enhance students' skills by identifying their potential. She stressed that '*Mu'allim* does not simply mean preparing for class and implementing the tools. It is a much deeper concept ... to communicate with students spiritually, intellectually, and professionally'. For Noora, on the other hand, the different terminologies seem to have no significant impact, for 'they are just names to me but might mean different in the field of *Tarbiyyah*,' she contended.

Education: *Ta'leem* or *Tarbiyyah*?

The second theme, i.e. whether education is *Ta'leem* or *Tarbiyyah*, also addresses this study's first research objective, namely exploring educational leaders' perspectives toward the meaning of education in Arabic. The analysis of the data here to reveals that a common thread that runs across the interviews is the blurred boundary between these two terms. For instance, Zainab claimed that people do not see the difference between these terms. For her, *Ta'leem* is more related to academic achievement, competence, and knowledge acquisition, whereas *Tarbiyyah* has more to do with pedagogy. Similarly, Fatima contended that the leadership is context-bound and thus affects how both *Ta'leem* and *Tarbiyyah* are perceived. As she put it,

If I were a leader in an educational setting, or if were a leader in the Ministry of Education, part of my job will involve *Tarbiyyah*. But, if I were a parent, *Ta'leem* is not necessarily a part of my parenting (*Tarbiyyah*). I am not required to teach my children.

Fatima went on to say that society expects education to play an important role in *Tarbiyyah* in terms of disciplining students and developing them as well-rounded individuals. In effect, the role of school and society is similar where both are expected to 'educate' students and enhance their moral development. Assertively, Ahmed initially referred to education as *Ta'leem*, but later connected it with *Tarbiyyah*. Reflecting on the recent name change of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Arabic from *Tarbiyyah* to *Ta'leem*, he explained, 'The absence of term and the concept in reality will lead to the absence of this concept in the practice. Any change or unclear use of the terms will lead to confusion and inconsistency in educators' practices each time'. Expanding on this point, he indicated that a *Murabbi* has theoretical knowledge of Islamic values and is therefore capable of practicing *Tarbiyyah*. When asked for further clarification, Ahmed stressed that irrespective of what religious background a *Murabbi* comes from, there is a common consensus on global human values in all religions. Along the same lines, Noora argued that 'The Ministry of Education now has removed the *Tarbiyyah* component [from the name of the ministry]'. Elsewhere in her comment, she stated,

Some people argue that *Tarbiyyah* should take place at home, not in school. But in my opinion, *Tarbiyyah* in the name of the institute is not important, because by default it extends to the school environment, at home, in the streets, etc. The child spends about 70% of his/her day at school. So, I cannot just limit his/her experiences to education (*Ta'leem*) only.

She clarified that students learn by example, for '*Tarbiyyah* ... unveils itself as a hidden curriculum that student grasps from their educational experiences'.

Sara provided contradictory thoughts about whom she perceives to be a teacher, educator, and leader ‘practicing *Tarbiyyah*.’ The accounts she gave disclosed switching between these terms. Sara views a teacher as a *Murabbi*, and she uses *Ustaz* to refer to the teacher. Furthermore, when asked for clarification, Sara stated, ‘*Murabbi* and *Tarbawi* are all the same. *Tarbiyyah* is *Murabbi*. It is derived from the word *Tarbiyyah*.’ Although Sara was revising her thoughts frequently, she emphasized that it is crucial to teach and embed *Tarbiyyah* in leaders’ practices. She argued,

Formal education school graduates should be aware of the essence of *Tarbiyyah*. But do they also practice it? Do they implement their knowledge? Or can they implement their knowledge? If yes, then we can call them *Murabbi*. Otherwise, no.

Providing a contrasting viewpoint, Hafsa had a different understanding of the terms. Her words weaved the concepts of *Mu’allim*, *Murabbi*, and *Tarbiyyah* together. She remarked, ‘*Tarbiyyah* means improving behaviors. *Al-Ta’leem* (Education) is improving academic performance. Whenever a *Mu’allim* improves the behavior of others, then he/she becomes a *Murabbi*.’

Overall, it is clear that the accounts by interviewees carry different understandings of what the terms ‘*Ta’leem*’ and ‘*Tarbiyyah*’ mean. Indeed, the importance of the different meanings associated with the concept of education in an Arab context, which remain open to interpretation, surfaced in the interview data. How the roles and expectations of educators and leaders are defined is primarily determined by subjective underpinnings. How do these leaders perceive educational leadership?

What is educational leadership?

Looking at educational leadership and who is an educational leader, participants shared their perspectives on what educational leadership implies. Reported perceptions by interviews highlight different perspectives. According to Zainab, for example, educational leadership should motivate and influence students, teachers, and the community to achieve a common goal. Noora, on the other hand, provided a literal translation of the term as ‘*Qiyada Tarbawiya*.’ When asked to explain, she remarked education refers to *Ta’leem*, while educational leadership means ‘*Qiyada Ta’leemia*’ (instructional leadership), a point Noora agreed with.

Compared to these two viewpoints, Asma associated educational leadership with leaning more toward values and character education. In her words, ‘Educational leadership is directing people toward having good ethics. Leading people toward a specific goal’. This claim was supported by Mohammad’s comments that ‘school leadership should instill, values and we have a discipline policy to enhance *Tarbiyyah*.’ Countering these accounts, Aisha argued that irrespective of what terminology the MoEHE uses as a label for the institution, educational leadership leans more toward a ‘*Tarbawi*’ (educational) component.

To gain a better understanding of educational leadership in Arab countries and its expanse in different spheres, the participants were asked whether educational leadership is confined exclusively to educational settings. Interesting, the interviewees generally echoed similar thoughts positing educational leadership ‘anywhere’ and ‘everywhere’, in contrast to it being limited to educational settings. The following words illustrate this point:

“I see educational leadership can be applied everywhere as the other way around. I personally believe in that” (Hafsa).

“Education leadership can be almost anywhere. Let’s say in educational leadership, it’s very different than community involvement can start from educating the parent and involving them in their education” (Asma).

“I see educational leadership more than a school and combined efforts like Shaikh in a mosque” (Ahmed).

Mohammad limited educational leadership to school settings or learning centers while the 10 other interviewees moved educational leadership beyond the context of schools and learning centers. The other 10 suggested that educational leaders are not confined to schools and learning centers only because ‘They are considered like our parents’, as one interviewee stated. In this respect, Asma remarked that her mother is her role model as an educational leader.

Leena echoed, ‘Educational leadership is very different from community involvement and can start from parent involving in education’. In turn, Sara advocated that ‘Prince Shaikh Tamim (the current Emir of Qatar) is an educational leader as he leads the country’s educational vision’. Hence, most educational leaders argued that educational leadership is not confined to the walls of educational settings but that it begins with parents from home and extends to a variety of fields bit educational and non-educational settings.

Finally, all school principals agreed that regardless of the new name of the Ministry of Education, their educational leadership focus is on *Tarbiyyah* as they intrinsically believe it to be a part of their role. By way of example, Aisha said, ‘Even if the Ministry of Education will say that we need to focus on *Ta’leem* and knowledge only, we still believe that education (*Tarbiyyah*) is our role’. Some participants noted that part of the confusion stems from educational borrowing from the West, which in turn negatively impacts ‘our education system’. The following quote from Fatima’s response illustrates this argument:

From my experience, the problem is with terminologies ... when I have strategic plans [borrowed from West] without taking into consideration the reality, the society, and many other factors ... I standardize an international definition of a strategy, and this would force me to abide by the international definition [understanding].

The practice of educational borrowing, in her opinion, is common these days; little or no thought is given to the skills and knowledge required to implement such educational policies. Further, she claimed that this lack of thought is ‘causing our educational system to deteriorate.’

Discussion

At a time of rapidly increasing global social, cultural, political, economic interactions, and the heightened growth and development of information technology, vivid and far-reaching, positive and negative, impacts on various aspects of education are self-evident, particularly in the areas of educational leadership. Citing Tikly (2001), Litz (2011) posited that education has turned into ‘one of the principle mechanisms by which global forces affect the daily lives of national populations’ (p. 48). Therefore, investigating the very

terminology used in educational discourse is especially important. While many Arab states have recently launched multiple reform initiatives to overhaul their education systems and improve the quality of their education, there still is no clear agreement on what, how and why Western educational concepts, models and theories should be borrowed and implemented in non-Western contexts such as that of Qatar and the broader Arab region.

Consistent with prior research, findings from the present study confirm that merely borrowing – and translating – existing Western terms and concepts in an attempt to apply them to the context of Qatar is fraught with difficulties. As was pointed out by Litz (2011), this raises

questions and dilemmas regarding international leadership development initiatives and the transferability and applicability of educational leadership paradigms and managerial models that have been predominantly developed in ‘Western’ nations as there is no question that some form of the sharing of knowledge and ideas will be essential to the formulation of systematic, integrated, and useful leadership development programs and practices in developing countries. (p. 57)

Undoubtedly, distinct meanings are associated with the ‘borrowed’ and ‘translated’ terms pertaining to educational leadership. This may result in ambiguous, ambivalent, or misinformed understandings of the meanings of these terms. For instance, a study conducted by Hammad and Hallinger (2017) shows that educational leadership and management research trends are concerned with leadership (34%), cultural contexts (29%), they fall short of mentioning conceptualizing or defining theories and new words, mainly that some educational practices are affected by terminology drifting. Terms like *Tarbiyyah*, learning, training, education, and teaching need clarifying further, especially in a context such as Qatar. Lack of clarity in deciphering the meaning of educational leadership terminology can impact policy formation, implementation, delivery, and outcomes.

The study’s results suggest references to educational leaders as being responsible for building learning organizations, sometimes and as being associated with schools, some other times. These results may be interpreted against the background of Qatar, which has of late undergone drastic educational reforms. Distance learning, homeschooling, and many other new modes of teaching and learning are in everyday. We argue that these new modes are problematic because the new discourse requires additional thought regarding how to select words that accurately capture the essence of the history and culture associated with educational leadership in the context under study. Our findings could be an indication that the terms *Ta’leem* or *Tarbiyyah* may inform and guide the expectations and performance of educators since both terms focus on instilling values and playing role models, especially as they serve in reflecting Islamic values and culture.

As the data disclosed, inconsistent use of terms is confusing. The arguments provided by interviewees echo our previous discussion about decontextualization and the indigenization of knowledge. Documented research shows an ever-increasing range of Western leadership initiatives that are traversing the globe and finding their way into developing countries and traditional cultures (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). Our results show that Western terms may be perceived as inconvenient and may not be applicable in the case of Qatar. The fact of the matter is that an indigenous understanding of

educational leadership may displace terms like *Ta'leem* or *Tarbiyyah* and deemphasize this indigenous perspective.

The linguistic situation of Arabic in the Arab region may also account for the inconsistent usage of educational terms and concepts and the discrepancy that typifies the different meanings attributed to those terms and concepts. As Elmgrab (2011) suggests,

Terminologists in the Arab world are not in total agreement on specific and exact procedures because terminology as a science is a new field of investigation. (3) The Arab world is basically divided in two main blocks with regard to the main foreign/second language used by the countries. This means that the translation of any term is bound to be influenced by the source language (usually English or French), which sometimes forces terminologists to accept or adopt at least two Arabic equivalents for some technical terms. (p. 76)

At this juncture, it is important to point out that when transferring foreign knowledge to the Arab world 'two sets of knowledge structure exist: the general secular system of education co-exists with the Islamic system of education; within the Islamic system, religious knowledge co-exists with modern knowledge which is stripped of its philosophical root' (Meyer, 1984, p. 145). However, Western education is secular and emphasizes the separation between the church and the state, thus creating a bifurcation between religious and secular knowledge. This split between religious and secular knowledge has grave intellectual consequences for Arab educational institutions (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2018; Meyer, 1884). Consistent with prior studies (Romanowski & Nasser, 2010). Arab educators can find confusion surrounding new Western knowledge and indigenous understandings, at times believing that religion, tradition and academic scholarship do not and cannot be intertwined. More importantly, transferred knowledge is questionable, and the split between the secular and religion might never be resolved.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Qatar changed the name and dropped the word *Tarbiyyah*, a step that interviewees did not understand. Was the change meant to focus only on knowledge, or was it intended to underscore the importance of instilling values as part of their vision? According to the interviewees, the MoE did not provide any clear communication on this, not even a glossary of terms in official educational documents. The interviewees clarified that their primary focus is on values and character building regardless of the MoE's expectations because this is what they believe in. The idea of dropping the word from the Ministry's title does not seem to be important, as some argued. For others, it reflects a Western ideology. Interviewees' complaints about lack of communication or sharing of information on the part of the MoE regarding the change of the Ministry's title would seem problematic. Could dropping the word *Tarbiyyah* be taken to mean eliminating the metaphysical and moral aspects of education and hence indicate a more secular approach to education. This is very critical at a time when Western educational policies and practices are being implemented in Qatar.

Although current practices of the MoEHE may be different, the name could indicate a shift toward more emphasis on knowledge and less or little on instilling Islamic values in students. This may have drastic implications for the school system and schooling in the country. It needs to be noted here that the demographic composition of the student population in Qatar is such that the school system caters to a very diverse student body. There are four predominant school types in Qatar to attend to the needs of citizens and

expatriates: Independent (public) schools, international private schools, Arabic private schools and community schools that follow the curricula of particular countries. Such a shift in emphasis could also affect the teacher's appraisal system. Those who assess teachers may base their assessment on *Tarbiyyah* while the teacher could be working within a paradigm informed by *Ta'leem*. This difference in terms and views of education could influence both the assessor as to how he/she conducts the assessment and the teacher who will be influenced by how he/she teaches.

Conclusions

We argue that in order to gain societal support for educational reform and the accompanying changes in practices, there needs to be an effort to define these English terms clearly and accurately linking these to specific Arabic terms. We would argue that when borrowing educational theories and practice, the process cannot be the simple transferring of knowledge. Instead, Western understandings of educational leadership are both quite complex and considerably developed. This creates a situation where elements of educational leadership are compartmentalized. For example, servant leadership, moral and ethical leadership, instructional leadership, to name a few, are presented as separate theories and have their own well-developed research base (Gumus, Bellibas, Esen, & Gumus, 2016). Thus, borrowed knowledge is often presented to locals in limited ways. For example, professional development will present instructional leadership void of other aspects of leadership, such as morality. The concept is never discussed in the context of indigenous ways of knowing, and locals seldom have difficulty embedded Western theories and practices within their cultural worldviews. We would suggest that Western theories be consciously aligned and discussed within the frameworks of indigenous concepts like *Ta'leem* or *Tarbiyyah*.

In addition, these findings may help in revising teacher preparation programs in Qatar and aligning the goals of the College of Education (*Tarbiyyah*) with those of the Ministry of Education (*Ta'leem*). The findings would further help in clarifying the differences, if any, between *Tarbawi* (pedagogue) and *Murrabi* (educator) and *Mu'allim* (instructor). This would affect the development of the teacher education program philosophy and the curriculum because each term demands different sets of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that need to be taught to and developed in prospective teachers. Moreover, to clarify the expectations of educational leadership's reach in varied sectors, it might be helpful to design a curriculum that includes educational leadership courses for all specializations (e.g. MBA, College of Business) as many leadership theories overlap.

This study points to the importance of gaining societal support for educational reform and the accompanying changes in practices by defining these English terms clearly and accurately linking these to specific Arabic terms. With these results in mind, this study highlights the necessity of such research in Arab countries, especially in a time of increased globalization. This study is not the first or the only to undertake intercultural and cross-cultural studies in educational leadership (Green et al., 2016; van der Wende, 2010). However, this study opens the path for future research to investigate how educational leadership is defined and translated in Arab countries, what the commonalities between these definitions are, whether these terms affect educators' practices, and how these definitions promote students' performance and enhance the quality of education.

Notes

1. *Tarbiyyah* may be defined as ‘the ideal approach in developing human nature, both directly through a method of verbal or visual communication, or indirectly through providing a role model, according to a specific curriculum that employs certain means and mechanisms in order to facilitate positive change.’ http://www.islamicstudiesresources.com/uploads/1/9/8/1/19819855/what_is_islamic_tarbiyah_the_usrah.pdf
2. *Ta’leem*, which means ‘education’ in Arabic, is one of the largest education providers in the Middle East. Taa’leem’s main activity is the development and management of early childhood, primary, and secondary schools. <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-meaning-of-Arabic-Urdu-word-Taleem>


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