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A Narrative Study Exploring Content and Process Influences on Male Teachers' Career Development

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ABSTRACT

Through a Systems Theory Framework, the study explored the systems of influence on male teachers' career development within individual, social, and environmental-societal contexts. Four male Qatari teachers recounted their stories of career past, present and future in this life history study. Narrative data from four female teachers were also collected to further understand teachers' work in this context. Three main patterns emerged from the analysis, constituting the influences *on becoming a teacher*, *on being a teacher*, and *on future prospects*. Implications for policy and practice are proposed as a set of design directions for a multidirectional career development model.

Introduction

The overwhelming complexity of our times and workplaces necessitates understanding career development in comparably complex ways (McMahon et al., 2014; Savickas, 2012). Teacher career development is no exception (Raduan & Na, 2020; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017; Rippon, 2005). The current study is grounded in an understanding that teachers are constantly negotiating life experiences and workplace contexts and constructing their careers as active agents (Savickas, 2012). For instance, in negotiating career choices, several researchers have noted personal and contextual influences on individuals' willingness to consider teaching as a career (Christensen et al., 2019; Van den Borre et al., 2021), as well as their decisions to remain in the profession beyond the first few years (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Dupriez et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). The complexities inherent in teacher recruitment and retention have become persistent considerations influencing teachers' career development (Qin, 2021; Van den Borre et al., 2021), specifically along gender-segregated lines (Dupriez et al., 2016; Johnson, 2008).

While teaching has traditionally been considered a respected profession, it is nonetheless feminized (McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019; Ponte, 2012). Females continue to show a higher propensity to enter the profession after graduation than males (Christensen et al., 2019; Low et al., 2011; Suryani, 2021), and commitment to teaching is higher among female teachers compared to male teachers (Štemberger, 2020). Gender role stereotyping has been found to discourage males from making the "nontraditional" career choice of becoming a teacher (McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019). Furthermore, some researchers claim that the association of the profession with care and nurturance has positioned it "outside the normative boundaries of what are acceptable masculine practices" (Johnson, 2008, p. 4; see also, McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017; Qin, 2021). For these and other reasons, gender imbalance in the teaching force has become a common characteristic across countries (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014; Johnson, 2008; Low et al., 2011; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017). In

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several countries, what makes this imbalance even more likely are the lower wages and status, demanding work conditions that accompany female-dominated professions, and experiencing negative social perceptions (McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017; Ponte, 2012; Qin, 2021; Sutcher et al., 2019).

Conscious efforts to recruit and retain male teachers have been rationalized based on several arguments. At first glance, there seems to be several “common-sense” assumptions put forward by some researchers who have emphasized role modeling and gender affiliation (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014; Johnson, 2008), as well as normative notions of male teachers being better equipped to address boys’ needs (Bullough, 2015), and better capable of delivering tough discipline (McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019). These arguments seem contentious when compared to notions put forward by other researchers who discuss the benefits for students who are taught by teachers who possess “insider knowledge” due to similar life experiences and cultural backgrounds (Ingersoll et al., 2018), as well as other notions which focus on demographic parity, such that the cultural/ethnic makeup of the teaching force should reflect that of the student population, and that of the larger population (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Additionally, arguments grounded on issues of gender equity and social justice have emphasized the need for creating an inclusive workforce where multiple perspectives can be facilitated and diverse teachers can participate in decision-making relating to, for example, policy and administration (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017). A final argument practically pertains to teacher shortages generally and the need to attract talented teachers, whether males or females, to ensure equitable opportunities for all students (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Suryani, 2021; Sutcher et al., 2019). While research findings are often inconclusive in regards to these arguments (Bullough, 2015; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019), the authors contended that in an education system where the division of labor along gender lines is institutionalized, the reasons behind recruiting and retaining male teachers may seem to be mere practical and logistic, yet may also be deeply-seated within the socio-cultural norms, beliefs and values specific to this context.

In Qatar, where this study took place, a shortage of teachers in public schools has traditionally been persistent, requiring officials to take active recruitment measures to attract teachers from mostly neighboring countries to the profession. The number of Qatari teachers in these schools is evident of their underrepresentation, while the scarcity of male Qatari teachers is more apparent. A recent statistic from the 2019/2020 academic year showed that the number of female Qatari teachers in public schools was about 24% (compared to 48% non-Qatari females), while that of male Qatari teachers was a mere 1% (compared to 27% non-Qatari males) (MOEHE, 2020). More female nationals have joined the teaching workforce in recent years. However, recruiting and retaining Qatari male teachers have proven to be more difficult. These numbers call for concern, specifically in a public education system segregated based on gender, requiring male teachers to teach male students beginning in the upper elementary level (grades 5–12). To compensate for the need of male teachers, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) recruits male teachers from neighboring Arab countries on provisional work visas. Such segregation aligns with the country’s cultural heritage, as traditional gender norms are readily accepted in Qatar, and males and females are typically confined to specific roles and expectations. This distinction of roles has perhaps encouraged men in Qatari society to seek more lucrative careers, and enabled them to demonstrate their masculinity and fulfill their ambition in the social and economic hierarchy. Consequently, teaching has been regarded as a gender-atypical profession for Qatari males, with very few exceptions.

Informed by the Systems Theory Framework (STF), the current study aimed to explore the content and process influences on Qatari male teachers’ career development. According to McMahan et al. (2014), the STF provides a useful lens for conceptualizing the complexity of career development, while considering the ways in which individuals exert their agency in constructing their careers and simultaneously negotiating the constraints within individual, social and environmental-societal systems. A life history approach was employed to give voice to the four Qatari males who already worked as teachers, highlight the influences on their career development, and make their experiences accessible to other potential male teachers. Notwithstanding the stigmatization of teaching as women’s

work (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019) and the need for greater gender diversity in the teaching profession (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017), the career stories and experiences of those males who were able to break through contextual barriers and become teachers become worthy of further study. Data from four Qatari female teachers were used as a comparative backdrop for the data collected from the male participants in order to isolate emerging influences based on gender differences.

In so doing, the study makes an important contribution to the field as it delivered a bottom-up perspective on the influences on male teachers' career development and called for a set of design directions for a multidirectional career development model, thus offering suggestions that may inform future practice and policy aimed at recruiting and retaining male teachers into public schools. The design principles were particularly derived from the study findings, which were used as a springboard for allocating creative solutions for advancing male career development.

Conceptual Framework: Systems Theory Framework

The Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development (McMahon & Patton, 2018; Patton & McMahon, 2014) is a metatheoretical account informed by the constructivist and social constructionist worldviews that recognize individuals as active agents in the production of their careers and acknowledge the contexts in which individuals construct their work lives (Savickas, 2013). As a metatheory, the STF draws on key constructs from other career development theories and applies them to understanding individual career behavior. Informed by systems theory, the emphasis is thus on “the importance of a whole being greater than the sum of its parts, the interrelationships between elements or subsystems of the system, and the changes that occur over time as a result of these interactions” (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 235).

The STF accommodates both content and process influences and organizes them as a series of complex and interconnecting systems which shape an individual's career development (McMahon & Patton, 2018). Central to the STF is the *individual as a complex adaptive system*, constituting a range of intrapersonal content influences, such as their values, beliefs, abilities, interests, self-concepts, age, gender, and ethnicity. With its multiple subsystems, this individual system does not live in isolation, but is conceptualized as part of a much larger context comprising the *social system* and the *environmental-societal system*, all set within the broader system of time, as the past influences the present, and together they influence the future. Thus, the social contexts in which individuals interact, including family, educational institutions, peers, and the media, as well as the broader systems of society and the environment, such as political decisions, historical trends, employment markets and globalization may seem less directly related to individuals, but nonetheless influence their career development (McMahon & Patton, 2018). This paper thus depicts teachers as complex individuals interacting within the social and environmental-societal contexts, and where the interplay of influences combines to construct their career development (Rippon, 2005).

Additionally, the STF also depicts the process influences which allude to the dynamic nature of career development and the interactions that occur within and between systems and subsystems (Patton & McMahon, 2014). For instance, *recursiveness* illustrates the multidirectional and nonlinear interaction between influences. As systems and subsystems are open, they are considered permeable to influence, and therefore change in one part of the system will stimulate change in another part of the system. Such recursive interaction further contributes to the microprocess of decision-making and the macroprocess of *change over time*, including changes to the nature and degree of influences. Thus, career development evolves and extends over an individual's life course (Savickas et al., 2009). Rather than seen as progressing vertically along a linear path in the organizational hierarchy, teacher career development should be seen as involving a diversity of life patterns that may be less predictable and will demand greater adaptability, flexibility, and mobility (Raduan & Na, 2020; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017; Savickas, 2012). In addition, *chance* may influence career development through unexpected and unplanned events, such as accidents, illness, organizational restructuring, or natural disasters. Given

the complexity of the influences on career development, these unanticipated events should be accounted for, especially when individuals are able to capitalize on such occurrences.

The STF thus rests on the premises that context is an integral part of systems theory and that decision-making is an integral part of career development. Adopting these assumptions from systems theory, research on career development can provide useful insight on how individuals learn about and make decisions within their unique context, “that is, how the interconnections between the individual’s subjective experience and their systems operate” (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 266). With that, this emphasis on individual meaning-making shifts the focus from the theory to the individual, as it is within the individual that the construction of meaning around the multiple influences relevant to career development occurs. In short, evident in the framework and its practical implications lie the core constructs of the individual-in-context perspective, narrative discourse, meaning-making, subjectivity and agency (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Research Methodology

Informed by STF, the study adopted a narrative inquiry, specifically a life history approach (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Floyd, 2012), to capture the context-richness and subjectivity of individuals’ career lives. Using life history research, “the inner experience of individuals and its connections with changing events and phases throughout the life course” can be captured (Bryman, 2008, p. 695). Goodson and Sikes (2001) explained that life history research recognizes that individuals’ personal and professional lives cannot be compartmentalized, and any influence on one area of their lives will have implications on other areas. They further contended that there exists a “crucial interactive relationship between individual’s lives, their perceptions and experiences, and historical and social contexts and events” (p. 2). Thus, narrative inquiry offered the potential for rich stories of teachers’ experiences, as these were then re-interpreted and a contextual layer added. These interpreted lives were made textual and became “life histories” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Thus, life history is an appropriate approach for researching the multiple and interacting influences on teachers’ career development, as it situates the individual perceptions and behaviors of teachers in structural, cultural and political contexts. Despite the limitations of a one-shot interview protocol in life history studies, participants were encouraged to reflect on the influences on their career development throughout the one-on-one interview and recount their career stories, past, present and future. Similar stories have been shown to reveal individuals’ multiple subjective realities by keeping close to their language, understanding their lived experiences, and identifying the reasons behind their career choices (Savickas, 2012). There are also many examples of life history and narrative approaches which have been employed to explore teachers’ careers (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017; Rippon, 2005). Yet, the current study explored a unique cultural context and education system which has recently witnessed major reform and attempts at modernization (Ellili-Cherif, 2012). The research questions that framed the current study were:

- (1) What are the factors influencing Qatari male teachers’ career development?
- (2) Which of these influences are gender specific to Qatari teachers’ career development?

Participants

Ethical issues were considered in accordance with guidelines from xxxx University’s IRB committee and approval was obtained ahead of the recruitment of participants. In order to establish a good correspondence between the research questions and the sampling techniques (Patton, 1990), four Qatari male and four Qatari female teachers were purposively selected to participate in the study. The data from the female teachers was meant to provide a comparative backdrop for the data collected from the male participants. The criteria used in the recruitment of participants ensured that they had

Table 1. Demographic data.

	Name	Age	Yrs of Experience	Specialization
Males	Mohamad	46	23	History
	Salem	47	25	Geography
	Hamad	45	20	Biology
Females	Turki	32	8	Islamic Studies
	Maryam	28	4	English
	Salwa	29	5	Arabic
	Fatima	41	15	History
	Noura	49	27	Biology

graduated from the national college of education, were teaching in the public school system, and had more than 3 years of experience, which meant they were no longer novice teachers.

By comparing these two sets of data, the authors acknowledged that there may be differences between male and female career development and sought to reveal the type and nature of influences (if any) on male teachers' career development, specifically based on gender differences. The authors also believed that female teachers' perspectives on male career development may provide an important backdrop for further understanding the socio-cultural factors surrounding teachers' work. In order to help protect participants' anonymity, they have been accorded pseudonyms and their school contexts have not been disclosed. All participants worked in the public school system and their demographic data is displayed in [Table 1](#) below.

Data Collection

Using a semi-structured interview protocol, participants reflected on several aspects pertaining to the past, present, and future influences on the development of their teaching careers. These reflections were guided by a series of open-ended questions and included the following main topics: (1) their own personal and societal views on teaching as a profession (e.g., job opportunities, status, salaries, promotion opportunities, etc.), (2) their previous decision-making and motivation for choosing teaching as a career (education institutions, peers, family, media, etc.), (3) their previous and current teaching experiences and roles (e.g., skills, knowledge, career identity, professional agency, etc.), (4) their perceptions of the school environment and support networks available in the workplace (school administration, teacher community groups, etc.), (5) their perceptions of common challenges in the workplace (e.g., workload, ministerial directives, student learning and behavior, etc.) and (6) their occupational aspirations for the further development of their careers.

During the interviews, participants were able to prioritize the experiences they perceived to be most salient to their career stories and the influences which they believed had the largest impact on their career choices. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 40–70 minutes. They were conducted in Arabic; participants' mother language, and at the schools where the participants were working.

Data Analysis

According to Floyd (2012), two main approaches can be used to analyze narrative data: 1) by reducing the data using coding and thematic analysis techniques, or 2) analyzing the data as a whole in narrative form. The authors chose to use both techniques together beginning with transcribing the interview data in its original Arabic language. Accordingly, while the uniqueness and wholeness of participants' stories were emphasized, the emerging patterns from the analysis of the narrative data provided a deeper understanding of and greater insight into the interconnectedness of systemic influences on their career-related choices and needs.

At first, the authors aimed to maintain the holistic narrative of the individuals' career stories as constructed by themselves. Accordingly, Author 1 constructed profiles of each of the participants

following Floyd (2012). Important sections from each participant were isolated and a narrative form was created using this data yet rewritten in English to make quoting participants more transparent. Together, the authors analyzed these individual profiles to identify interconnections within and between them. This initial step acquainted them with the participants' stories.

Following this step, the authors read and reread the transcripts and the rewritten stories multiple times while taking notes, highlighting important sections, and labeling them using codes. The authors were cognizant to categorize experiences as they unfolded over time and maintain the chronological nature of events as the codes were developed in order to account for the life history approach adopted (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The initial codes were revisited and a list of emerging patterns was identified by merging and renaming codes into themes. The authors conducted several rounds of discussions in order to reach consensus on the final set of themes, while attending to the interactions among the multiple influences on career development, as suggested by the theoretical framework.

Finally, by drawing on extant literature and the theoretical framework, these localized narratives were interpreted in light of the broader national, social and political context (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Findings and Discussion

In accordance with the theoretical framework, multiple influences on career development interact and interrelate in often complex ways. For this reason, the findings of the factors influencing male career development are presented in light of the narrative inquiry which emphasizes the temporal features of participants' stories. Accordingly, the findings are organized into three main sections: the past (*on becoming a teacher*), the present (*on being a teacher*), and the future (*on future prospects*). Within each section, multiple interacting factors emerged within the individual, social, and environmental-societal systems influencing their career development. These factors are documented in the text below following the number assigned to each participant, such that IS refers to the individual systems, SE refers to the social systems, and ESS refers to the environmental-societal systems. The findings and discussion are presented concurrently in the following sections.

On Becoming a Teacher

For two male teachers, Mohamad and Salem, becoming a teacher was never their first choice. Mohamad was pursuing a history degree when "a decision was made on behalf of all students to get a degree in education and become a teacher for two years" (M1; ESS). Despite the central role of chance in the initial stages of his career choices, Mohamad later changed his views and played a more agentic role in his decision to remain in the profession beyond the "imposed" two years of teaching. Similarly, Salem's choice of becoming a teacher was due to limited career opportunities at the time. He graduated with a degree in education and has continued in the profession motivated by his commitment to his students.

Contrasting these two participants, Hamad and Turki had chosen to become teachers. They both indicated a spiritual and patriotic commitment to the profession and Islamic teachings. For instance, Hamad was very much aware of "the hardships of the task in advance and society's negative views of the profession," nonetheless, he became a teacher "to make a difference in [his] community and serve [his] country" (M3; IS). Turki also shared similar beliefs in his determination to "raise academic achievements of students and prepare them as influential, useful and productive individuals who are capable of advancing the country for generations to come" (M4; IS).

Whether by first choice or not, the four male teachers entered teaching for reasons documented commonly in other studies (Bullough, 2015; Low et al., 2011; Štemberger, 2020; Suryani, 2021). That is, they had become teachers for positive reasons, such as believing it would make a change in students' lives, contribute to the greater good of society, and would be a challenging yet rewarding career.

While motivation may have led our participants to become interested and committed to teaching, their inspirations came from the social system (Ponte, 2012; Suryani, 2021). Thus, two interrelated factors played decisive roles in becoming a teacher for the four male participants. The first factor related to the influence of significant others in supporting their career development. The role of college professors, who emphasized teaching as a lofty profession, was particularly noted by three participants who described them as “mentors” (M1; SS) and “role models” (M3, SS). As for Turki, his mother “was [his] biggest motivator who prodded [him] to become a teacher like herself” (M4; SS). The influence of significant others cannot be underestimated, especially when such inspiration comes from others who were in the teaching profession, such as family members and former teachers (Christensen et al., 2019). Similar to Ponte (2012), this finding provides a strong message to teachers about how their role in the classroom entails much more than facilitating students’ learning to an essential recruitment factor for inspiring future students to become teachers. The second social system factor related to the influence of their teacher preparation and initial training opportunities. While only one participant received a “well-rounded” preparation while at college (M2; SS), the other three male participants considered their initial induction to be an important factor “for [their] readiness and qualification to teach” (M1; SS).

Within the societal-environmental contexts, the four male participants narrated a similar story consisting of factors that they described as the “ebb and flow” (M4; ESS) of the teaching profession. On the one hand, there was unanimous agreement that the profession “comes at the bottom of the list” (M3; ESS); in other words, “it is a marginal career that does not enjoy the respect and recognition as other careers” (M2; ESS). These popular beliefs were described as “deeply rooted cultural perceptions which have been around for many years until this day” (M1; ESS). According to Hamad and Salem, such beliefs were accompanied by perceptions of compassion for any individual who decides to become a teacher. In Salem’s words, “when someone hears that I am a teacher, their look turns into sympathy . . . as they understand the hardships that teachers endure and know that the job never ends, not even after school hours” (M2; ESS).

These perceptions were further shared by the four female teachers, who confirmed similar societal perspectives toward teaching as a “female profession” (F2; IS). Through the process of socialization, Maryam contested “the stereotypical view of teaching as being unsuitable for males, who grow up knowing that teaching isn’t even an option for them . . . even though many of them could have made great teachers” (F1; IS). Over the years, according to Noura, teaching had continued to lose its societal status and respect. With 27 years of experience, she described how “there was recognition for teachers, there was respect and prestige . . . now all teachers suffer from society’s disrespect for the profession” (F4; ESS). In comparison to their male counterparts, the female teachers voiced stronger discontentment with the societal status of the teaching profession. As a result, they revealed a declining interest in teaching particularly among male teachers.

According to Dries et al. (2008), socialization processes are particularly powerful influences on individuals’ career choices. Through such processes, certain cultures limit men’s desirability to pursue careers in feminine sectors by emphasizing their job titles and status in society, as seen in the current context of this study. Similar to Štemberger’s (2020) findings, the existing stereotypes related to male and female roles in the Qatari culture played a particularly strong influence on teachers’ career choices. Qin (2021) further contended the importance of the status of the teaching profession more generally on teachers’ job satisfaction, continuous professional development (PD), and attrition rates. Additionally, attracting qualified graduates becomes more likely when the teaching profession is highly valued (see, Qin, 2021).

On the other hand, the four male participants also agreed that Qatari teachers, specifically males, enjoy the “best opportunities through the ministry, which provides many incentives for teachers, including high salaries and benefits” (M1; ESS). Interacting with this environmental-societal factor, Hamad contended that while other professions do not have equally high salaries, “their employees can engage in self-employment after work hours and earn much more than teachers do” (M3; IS). Our participants, however, did not think that increasing teacher pay would lead to recruiting more Qatari

males into the profession. This finding contradicts calls from a multitude of studies from other countries, where teaching is generally not esteemed for its financial benefits (Dupriez et al., 2016; Ponte, 2012; Van den Borre et al., 2021). This finding should be seen in light of the economic standing of Qatari nationals who enjoy high salaries in a country which ranks among the wealthiest in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Agreeing with Christensen et al. (2019), there are numerous systemic issues which need to be addressed for a more comprehensive solution. These are taken up in the form of a set of design directions toward the end of this paper.

On Being a Teacher

The analogy of the “ebb and flow” (M4; ESS) of the teaching profession may also be used in describing the enabling and constraining factors influencing the participating male teachers’ career development. As a constraining factor, all male participants emphasized the “limited promotion opportunities” (M3; ESS) available to teachers. They illustrated this issue by referring to their extensive experience in the field, and the fact that they had never been promoted or bestowed a title change. Hamad explained that he “had been a teacher for 20 years and [he] was still working under the title of teacher, while [he] could have possibly become a mentor or lead teacher, yet promotion opportunities remain within a limited framework” (M3; ESS). Salem elaborated on the effort and time needed to “climb up the hierarchy to become a subject coordinator, academic principal and principal,” (M2; ESS) and decided to remain in the classroom over “adding to [his] already heavy workload” (M2; IS).

In this respect, the female teachers shared similar concerns. For instance, Maryam explained that “there is no career ladder for teachers, and it is impossible for all teachers to be promoted on the ladder of coordinators and principals” (F1; ESS). Fatima described promotion opportunities as based on “serendipity or nepotism,” and in both cases “teachers aren’t differentiated according to their experiences or skills” (F3; ESS). Accordingly, Fatima attributed the reluctance of male teachers from joining the profession to a “lack of promotion opportunities and recognition, which other professions enjoy” (F3; ESS). Noura also noted “nepotism at work” and shared a story similar to Hamad’s, as she also had been “a teacher for 27 years, and never once promoted . . . despite completing the licensure requirements, [she] didn’t receive any reward or recognition” (F4; ESS).

These stories are all too common in the literature, specifically in education systems that lack clear guidelines for career advancement (Darling-Hammond, 2017). There was a noticeable level of frustration among participants with the lack of promotion opportunities. These opportunities were restricted for teachers who did not want to take on administrative roles, and preferred to stay in their classrooms. Current promotion policies did not contain teachers’ aspirations for receiving advanced titles and recognition, as the only way up in the hierarchy was to leave the classroom and become a vice principal or school principal. This finding is supported by previous studies that incorporate such opportunities as a necessary job condition (Dupriez et al., 2016; Rippon, 2005). After several years at the job, many teachers may become relentless and look to extend their roles (Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Rippon, 2005). When teachers are able to develop their roles, they become safeguarded from feelings of disengagement and disinterest (Lovett & Cameron, 2011). This does not necessarily mean creating advancement pathways which move teachers out of their classrooms, but providing them with professional learning opportunities and retention prospects associated with their new roles and responsibilities (Furner & McCulla, 2019; Raduan & Na, 2020).

Moreover, the most evident challenge emerging from the four narrations retold by the male participants was the “physical and psychological fatigue” (M1; IS) experienced daily. For example, Hamad was particularly concerned about the mental health and well-being of teachers who “endure many psychological difficulties from dealing with diverse people with different mentalities; students and parents, and then working long hours with multiple tasks and requests . . . all the while, they can’t be absent for any period of time because this will cause more work to pile up and no one can fill in for them” (M3; SS). In recounting similar challenges, Mohamad could not envision a way to resolve such issues, as “these tasks are the core of teaching and it is impossible to get by without doing them,” and

added, “there can never be radical solutions to overcome these challenges” (M1; IS). In his reflections on schooling past and present, Salem observed that “the only difference lies in the administrative paperwork that was added to the teacher’s work, and which caused a huge rift between the teacher and his basic task, which turned him into an employee who focuses most of his attention on paperwork, documentation, and other means which are considered evidence of his performance and accomplishments” (M2; SS).

The four female teachers also described similar workload challenges. Particularly, Salwa was apprehensive about the effect of the workload on her responsibility toward students. She sometimes questioned her motives for being a teacher and feared “reaching a breaking point where [she] becomes too overwhelmed with too many things to do” (F2; SS). Fatima also shared these perceptions by illustrating a “fast paced and horrible workload,” and added, “there’s always this rush that causes pressure and constant stress to submit things otherwise [they] get a warning” (F3; SS). Unlike their male counterparts, the female teachers also discussed the struggles they faced with home duties and the feelings of guilt “for neglecting their children and other family duties because they must take their work home” (F4; IS). According to Fatima, the workload was “pushing graduates, whether females or males, away from becoming teachers and accepting lower paying jobs but with much less stress,” and added, “unless this changes, there will be fewer Qatari teachers joining the profession in the coming years” (F3; ESS). In comparison to the past, Fatima stated that “teaching was the only available option for females, now even they have other career options as the country opens up and becomes more modernized” (F3; ESS).

Both male and female teachers illustrated the demands of teaching on their professional lives, however, the female teachers were more cognizant of such demands on their personal lives as well. A heavy workload is not new to the education field. Several studies have documented a process of intensification of teaching duties, such as excessive paperwork, which disempowers teachers, causes job dissatisfaction, and leads to disengagement (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Johnson, 2008). A heavy workload appears to be a more important reason for leaving the profession than other factors (Qin, 2021; Rippon, 2005; Sutchter et al., 2019), yet one which may be mediated by the presence of other job conditions, such as higher status and better career opportunities (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Qin, 2021).

Adding to this constraint of a heavy workload, two male participants; particularly Hamad and Salem, expressed their frustration with a lack of autonomy. Illustrating this issue, Hamad noted the way “teachers follow the lesson plans developed by the ministry without any individual input . . . and they are mostly prohibited from creating any additional material” (M3; ESS). In delivering the material, “teachers,” according to Salem, “have some freedom in deciding on how to teach the lesson, however, this freedom is restricted by the regulations and policies of the ministry, which a teacher is not allowed to bypass” (M2; ESS). He further explained the way the “education system is based on accountability . . . and the close monitoring and examination of teachers’ actions from students and parents, as well as the coordinator, school principals, the evaluation committee and others,” and added that “a teacher can’t leave the school without permission, let alone take part in decision making” (M2; ESS). This has led to an “unattractive profession for male Qatari teachers, who prefer more autonomy and freedom than teaching can offer” (M3; ESS).

Three female teachers also confirmed this lack of autonomy. Fatima illustrated this issue as “working like a clock . . . as teachers don’t have the ability to change the lesson plan or lesson pacing, they are held accountable for the smallest details,” and added, “there is no autonomy or freedom, it’s all about accountability” (F3; SS). Noura supported this perception and claimed that “teaching has become more like office work, [she] fills in paperwork and follows orders, but in the end, students and their well-being should be [her] first priority, and [she] will need the freedom to move things around and be able to address their needs as they arise” (F4; SS). In this regard, both male and female teachers illustrated similar levels of demand on their career development.

A lack of autonomy and tightened accountability measures are common in the literature (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Qin, 2021). Both process tend to go hand in hand, as ministerial directives aim to produce consistency and uniformity in expectations and performance within and across public schools (Ellili-

Cherif, 2012). The Qatari education system has adopted conceptions of professionalism grounded in neoliberalism and rigid managerialism which has led to degrading teachers and undermining the attractiveness of the profession for male and female teachers alike (Ellili-Cherif, 2012). Policymakers can thus play an important role in supporting teachers to be able to work as autonomous professionals, capable of enacting their professional agency and leadership skills as the need arises (Du & Chaaban, 2020). Specifically, knowledgeable teachers may be identified, prepared and assigned to formal teacher leadership roles and contribute to improvements to school culture and instruction (Supovitz & Comstock, 2021).

Notwithstanding the “burdens of a teacher’s job” (M4; SS) and the “lack of autonomy” (M3; ESS), the four male teachers agreed that having a supportive school administration contributed to a “healthy work environment” (M2; SS). They recounted stories of encouragement, appreciation and respect, which Hamad emphasized in this comment, “all a teacher needs is this kind of moral support which will have a positive influence on [their] productivity” (M3; IS). They also recounted stories of past encounters with unsupportive school administrations. For Salem, “the absence of a supportive principal can impact the morale of teachers and turn the school into a military institution of following orders and machine-like work without soul” (M2; SS). Having experienced several administrations over the years, Turki could clearly describe the importance of the school principal’s role in “motivating teachers and renewing their efforts to work even more” (M4; SS).

To confirm the importance of a supportive school administration, three female teachers described their first-hand experiences with a “negative work environment” (F1; IS) and “unsupportive administration” (F2; SS). For Salwa, the school principal “did not appreciate the workload that teachers had . . . and her evaluations were unfair” (F2; SS). Maryam considered her school environment to be “restrictive and resistant to innovative ideas [as] they don’t support any ideas for improvement” (F1; SS). The issue, according to Noura, lied in the variations among schools in implementing ministerial regulations, as “there is no consistency among school principals and little quality control” (F4; SS). Fatima also confirmed this notion of variability among school administrations, where “some principals are more supportive than others, others might abuse their power and can use it against some teachers” (F3; SS).

Evidently, both male and female participants alluded to an important factor influencing teachers and their work. The leadership literature has consistently emphasized the need for strong and stable leadership (Levin et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019), leaders who are skilled and knowledgeable (Stosich, 2021; Stronge & Xu, 2021) yet more importantly caring and supportive (Louis et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2022). However, the hierarchical structures governing schools tend to create individualized leadership practices among a selected few, and prevent its potential for becoming a shared activity (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Stosich, 2021).

One enabling factor, though, pertained to the availability of PD opportunities. All the male participants identified multiple PD activities offered through the MOEHE, various external institutions, and the school. Despite mixed perceptions about the benefits of such PD opportunities, the four male participants unanimously agreed that “peer learning opportunities supported by the school administration were the most beneficial for their professional learning” (M4; SS). For example, Hamad explained the benefits of peer observations as having “a large influence on teachers’ openness to other teaching methods . . . and can contribute to developing teaching abilities and skills by getting an insider view into other teachers’ knowledge and skills” (M3; IS).

The narratives from the four female teachers seconded similar perceptions for PD activities without variations among the two groups of participants. According to Coldwell (2017), the likely influence of PD on career development involves a complex interplay of factors, not only related to the quality and type of PD, but also to the individuals involved and their organizational contexts. Generally speaking, PD which caters to teachers’ diverse needs within subject-specific contexts is often considered an important factor in teachers’ intentions to stay in the profession (Coldwell, 2017; Gu & Day, 2007). Particularly for this study’s participants, peer learning opportunities accompanied by senior leader support is worth considering in future efforts to retain teachers (Furner & McCulla, 2019; Rippon,

2005), given the authority of school leaders in enabling teacher learning opportunities and facilitating teacher change initiatives (Coldwell, 2017; Furner & McCulla, 2019).

On Future Prospects

Continuing on a positive note, three male participants' career development was still moving toward remaining inside the classroom. Turki was the only male participant with aspirations to become a principal and had been pursuing his "dream" for several years by following the "long and vague" path of licensure requirements (M4; IS). Participants' motives for remaining in the profession were located within the individual system of professional identity, as Salem explained that "after 25 years of working in the field, [he] knows nothing about professional life other than teaching" and plans on "staying in the field until [his] retirement" (M2; IS).

Furthermore, and constituting an enabling factor, there was unanimous agreement among the male participants that the recruitment and retention of male teachers should be based upon cultural assumptions particular to the Qatari context. According to Salem, "the Qatari teacher is the closest to understanding the nature of his society and its emotional and family connections" (M2; IS). Therefore male Qatari teachers have become an "indispensable need not only for the classroom, but for the well-being of the society and community" (M2; IS). Mohamad also noted the need for more male Qatari teachers as "they understand the culture, customs, and dialect of the students . . . which enable them to communicate better and consolidate the customs and traditions of their community" (M1; IS).

Confirming these views, the four female teachers also established the need for male Qatari teachers based on cultural assumptions. "Students," according to Salwa, "have changed, and their need for teachers who come from the same background will help them develop national identities and preserve their Qatari culture," she added, "it's not that the expatriates are not important, but male Qatari teachers can support young males because they share the same culture and understandings" (F2; IS). Further, Maryam emphasized this need based on behavioral assumptions, such that "male Qatari teachers can have a positive influence on boys' behavior issues and help them navigate the challenges they face as role models" (F1; IS). This essentialist view toward gender and teaching, which considers male teachers as role models for male students, has generally been criticized in previous studies (Bullough, 2015; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017), and the male teachers in this study did not share similar views to their female counterparts in this regard. The fact that male students in Qatari public schools are taught exclusively by male teachers, whether Qatari or non-Qatari, may have been behind the limited acceptance of this view.

The perceived need for more male Qatari teachers was thus based on cultural assumptions in an education system occupied by expatriate teachers from mostly neighboring Arab countries. Therefore, there is a renewed emphasis on such assumptions, particularly on the notion that the teaching workforce should reflect the diversity of the student population and the broader community (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Additionally, schools are sites where students' identities are developed, shaped and negotiated (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017), and where cultural beliefs and practices are transferred through social interactions and observations among its members. Hence, there is a need for cultural representations in public schools in the form of male Qatari teachers.

Moving forward, the ways for recruiting and retaining teachers, according to the four male participants, resided in the ministerial system. For one, the MOEHE, according to Mohamad, can play a proactive role in "advertising for jobs and highlighting the competitive salaries and benefits which many potential teachers may not know about" (M1; IS). According to Salem, the rules and regulations currently hindering teachers' autonomy should be replaced with "greater freedom and power . . . accompanied with clear guidelines for promotions which will raise their status in society . . . while also reducing accountability measures that suffocate the teacher" (M2; IS). Hamad also contended that "Qatari teachers should be given the opportunity to contribute to decision making and become the main fabric of the education system," yet more prominently, he called for "changing the work mechanisms which will reduce the cumbersome workload and facilitate teachers' tasks" (M3; IS).

Turki first focused on teacher motivation, appreciation and recognition. In his explanation, he recounted the way he had received recognition for an initiative he had launched accompanied with feelings of “satisfaction and accomplishment” (M4; IS). Later, he also focused on enhancing teacher privileges and benefits, such that “it may compete with other employees who don’t work nearly as much as teachers” (M4; IS).

Similarly, the four female teachers envisioned comparable suggestions. For instance, Maryam saw the need for a specific career ladder for teachers who did not want to leave the classroom. She gave examples from other countries which have such systems in place, and where “teachers can be promoted in different directions, such as becoming a lead teacher or master teacher” (F1; IS). Also similarly, Fatima believed in restoring “societal views and trust in teachers and teaching,” that is by “reforming educational policies and the way schools are currently managed, as these are also inter-related with societal views” (F3; IS). These and other implications for policy and practice are presented below.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The study adopted a Systems Theory Framework (STF) as a theoretical foundation for analyzing the narrative data obtained from the four male Qatari teachers, as well as four female Qatari teachers used as a backdrop for comparison and identifying multiple influences on their career development. In the sections above, several factors which limited male Qatari representation were documented, which bare similarities with the extant literature, particularly the status of the profession, gender stereotyping, opportunities for professional development and promotion, school leadership, workload, and autonomy (McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019; Ponte, 2012; Qin, 2021; Sutchter et al., 2019). While the female teachers shared mostly similar perceptions on the factors influencing career development, they differed in their convictions relative to the societal status of the profession, thus illustrating stronger discontentment. In addition, the female teachers focused more specifically on the demands of teaching in relation to their home and familial duties. Lastly, while some female teachers held contested views on the role of males in the classroom, the male teachers emphasized the cultural need for Qatari nationals in a way that reflects the diversity of the student population and the broader community.

Such findings provide a useful foundation for policy makers at the MOEHE and local universities who are interested in increasing the representation of male Qatari teachers, and perhaps even female Qatari teachers as similar factors influencing their career development were noted. More male Qatari teachers in the workforce does not mean less female Qatari teachers. As mentioned earlier, public schools are divided along gender lines, which makes addressing the male Qatari teacher shortage a cause for concern for practical and logistic reasons because female teachers cannot fill in this void. Policy makers are encouraged to consider the intricacies of recruiting male Qatari teachers more holistically and extend the advantages of nationally brewed teachers beyond the simple notions of role models or disciplinarians, as evidently multiple factors were at play in their career development.

Based on the study findings, a number of implications for policy and practice are proposed in the form of a set of design directions for a multidirectional career development model. These design principles are based on the study findings, but also use such findings as a springboard for allocating creative solutions for advancing male career development.

The first design principle comprises the development of career advancement trajectories which take different directions, whether upward or lateral. In a multidirectional career development model (Raduan & Na, 2020), teachers can enact agency in pursuing career advancement based on their personal interests, professional skills, autonomy, and work-life conditions, accompanied with anticipated increases in income, rank or status (Rippon, 2005). The traditional linear career model, similar to that described by our participants, places teachers on a highly structured and rigid trajectory from teacher to coordinator, academic vice principal and principal. While it may be possible to skip certain stages, the fact remains that any promotion will remove teachers from the classroom. Because the organizational hierarchy is the only ladder to climb on, almost all participants have never experienced

promotion in this sense. While it may seem logic that not all teachers can (or should) become principals, the fact remains that teachers need other career development alternatives which do not compromise their remaining in the classroom, but nonetheless offer them the recognition, respect, and appreciation they expect and deserve. Exploring ways in which other countries have designed their systems for recruiting, preparing, developing, and retaining teachers may give inspirations for developing a customized system suitable for the Qatari context (see, Darling-Hammond, 2017; Raduan & Na, 2020; Rippon, 2005). Additionally, Raduan and Na (2020) have emphasized the need to integrate career development with expertise development, which will give purpose for needs-based professional learning across teachers' work lives. The literature on teacher leadership, both formal and informal, also carries potential for guiding policy makers in designing career advancement opportunities which are connected with classroom learning rather than with leadership in its traditional sense (Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Stosich, 2021)

A second design principle targets the collaborations between college-level teacher preparation programs and public schools. At the college level, programs should explicitly address gender and identity issues and deconstruct stereotypes, particularly through discussions, critical analyses, and debates (Ponte, 2012). Specifically, veteran or experienced male Qatari teachers may play an important role in such activities, which may be further scaled up to become university-wide events. Additionally, relying on male Qatari teachers to become mentors for male student teachers as they complete their practicum requirements can lead to positive motives and outlooks for the profession (Johnson, 2008). According to the study findings, the role of significant others and well-rounded teacher preparation has contributed positively to our participants' career choices. Both factors require further consideration in any future plans for recruiting and retaining male Qatari teachers.

A third design principle pertains to giving careful attention to school cultures and structures (Rippon, 2005). In terms of structure, the MOEHE plays a defining role in Qatari public schools, and this point was taken up in the first design principle. Yet, based on our participants' observations, there were large variations among school cultures, and where school leaders play a more decisive role. For one, school cultures that are conducive to learning for students, teachers, and leaders alike share common features (Rippon, 2005). As one example, the literature on leadership for learning (MacBeath et al., 2018; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009) has theorized what such cultures look like, and provides a springboard for future discussions on designing schools as places where leadership and learning intersect and interact productively (Stosich, 2021). Adhering to the systems thinking perspective advocated in this study, the authors contend that multiple factors and conditions inherent within school cultures should be considered at any one time.

A fourth design principle should be targeted toward national programs specifically dedicated to schools, through career education or counseling programs, which reach out to students in different age groups. One of the purposes of such programs may be breaking down traditional stereotypes of gendered roles and enhancing national identity and commitment. Non-government organizations may work hand-in-hand with MOEHE specialists in preparing and launching such programs, including awareness sessions for male Qatari students about the status of teaching, its links to national identity and cultural socialization. Activities may further include debates among students, shadowing male Qatari teachers, and discussions with local colleges of education.

Final Thoughts

The study explored the multiple and interacting influences on male Qatari teachers who have managed to join and remain in the profession. The intricacies of the past, the present and the future, as illustrated in participants' narratives, revealed the complexities inherent in teachers' career development. This information may constitute important consideration in the recruitment and retainment efforts targeted at male Qatari teachers. The authors agree with the notions put forward by McMahon and Patton (2018), in that career development is a social construction, which evolves within historical, political, and cultural contexts. Therefore, by adopting systems thinking, the authors have emphasized

that simple, patchwork solutions will not suffice, and the multiplicity of factors influencing the career development of male Qatari teachers requires concerted efforts within different systems simultaneously. In short, it takes a system to recruit, develop, and retain teachers; one that includes equal consideration to the factors influencing both male and female teachers, Qatari and non-Qatari, for the sake of the study context. Recommendations for future research should target the demographic makeup of the teachers working in public schools, and compare the way several factors interact and influence their career development collectively.

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