Developing the Leadership Capability of School Principals at Public Intermediate Schools in Kuwait

Ibrahim Alhouti & Trevor Male
UCL Institute of Education

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Abstract
Kuwait is facing a set of challenges in its education system. Some of these challenges are related to the quality of education and some are related to school administration, especially in training programmes and leadership skills. To avoid these challenges, the Kuwait Ministry of Education has established a long-term strategy to reform the education system, and the Ministry gives the schools the main value in this strategy. These challenges increase the pressure on school leaders. Consequently, the quality of school principals is significant in these reforms; they should have the capability to lead the schools during the reform process. Educational leadership is given wide attention across the world because of its position in schools and thus in our lives. Therefore, schools need to be guided by leaders of a high quality, which prepared well to give them the capability to be effective leaders. This is a research project aims to help with the development of the leadership capability of principals in intermediate schools in Kuwait by looking closely at their skills and the preparation and development programmes that are available to them. Ten intermediate school principals will be interviewed in order to understand directly from them the qualities that they consider school principals need to lead public schools in Kuwait and whether or not their preparation was good. It also aims to explore different leader preparation programmes that are now available in other countries and to look at which ones may be suitable for the Kuwaiti context to be in the suggestions.

Correspondence:

Dr. Trevor Male
London Centre for Leadership & Learning,
UCL Institute of Education,
20 Bedford Way,
London. WC1H 0AL

E: t.male@ioe.ac.uk
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A) Introduction

Educational leadership is given wide attention across the world because of its position in schools and thus in our lives (Bottery, 2004). Bush (2011) states that “the significance of effective leadership and management for the successful operation of schools and colleges has been increasingly acknowledged in the twenty-first century” (p.ix). Moreover, the large amount of educational research in this field is increasing and reflects the importance of leadership (Earley, 2013). Therefore, schools need to be guided by leaders of a high quality to give themselves the capability to be effective leaders. Consequently school leaders need good preparation and development programmes that help them to be more effective, and to be able to work in their role.

This is a proposal for a research project that aims to help with the development of the leadership capability of principals in intermediate schools in Kuwait by looking closely at their skills and the preparation and development programmes that are available to them. The paper will include a brief outline of the context of this research and the purpose and the significance of the study. A review of the relevant literature will help to build the conceptual framework that will guide the research. Methodology that is suitable for this research will be discussed.

B) Context of the Study

This research will take place in Kuwait, the home of the first author where he worked as a teacher. Kuwait is a small Arabic country that is located in the Middle East. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has the authority on all educational sectors in Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti Constitution (1962) guarantees the right to education. Article 40 of the Kuwaiti Constitution states:

Education is a right for Kuwaitis, guaranteed by the state in accordance with law and within the limits of public policy and morals. Education in its preliminary stages is compulsory and free in accordance with the law.
The education system in Kuwait “is organised according to a general organization through which the trends of the didactic and educational process are specified as a prelude to achieving the philosophy and goals of education in Kuwait” (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2008:19). However, the MOE needs to reform the education system in Kuwait to bring about positive change that will help progress the nation so she can face future challenges and be one of the advanced countries in education (NIE-Singapore, 2013).

Kuwait has two different types of schools: public (government) schools and private schools. Only the public schools are free for Kuwaitis. Following kindergarten, Kuwait has three learning stages: primary school (grades 1–5), intermediate school (grades 6–9) and secondary school (grades 10–12). The MOE has authorized public schools to appoint teachers and to decide in which school they work; they also have the authority to choose their own school principals and other leadership staff in the school. As in other countries, teachers progress to leadership roles from the bottom up, through head of department, to deputy head and finally principal. In Kuwait you need at least five years as a teacher, followed by five years as a head of department, and then five years as a deputy head before being a school principal, these numbers of years could be changed according to the demand. At every stage there is a test and an interview set by the MOE, and the aim of these tests and interviews is to check the teacher’s qualifications. However, passing the test does not necessarily mean that one can assume a position as this also depends on availability.

It is important to show in this context what is available now for preparing and developing school principals. However, Kuwait has two main problems in school leader development: “(a) the lack of a formal preparation program for school principals and (b) the lack of standards for that educational development program” (Alansari, 2012: 2). The National Report of Kuwait Ministry of Education (2008) and the MOE website make no mention of preparation and development programmes.
C) Purpose of the Study

This research study aims investigate the views of intermediate school leaders in Kuwait by looking at their skills and the preparation and development programmes that they have been involved in throughout their careers to see how their capability might be improved. It also aims to explore different leader preparation programmes that are now available in other countries and to illustrate them as examples in order to show how these programmes are arranged and designed. It is hoped that this research will help to explore what leaders need in order to be effective in their schools.

D) Significance of the Study

Like other nations, Kuwait is facing a set of challenges in its education system (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2008). Some of these challenges are related to the quality of education (NIE-Singapore, 2013) and some are related to school administration, especially in training programmes and leadership skills (Alansari, 2012). To avoid these challenges, the MOE has established a long-term strategy to reform the education system, and the Ministry gives the schools the main responsibility in this strategy (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2008). These challenges increase the pressure on school leaders. Consequently, the quality of school principals is significant in these reforms; they should have the capability to lead the schools during the reform process. However, school principals feel that they are “too far [away] to reach the vision of the Ministry of Education” (Alsaeedi & Male, 2013:649) and they needed to develop on their own. This issue gives the significance to this research: to hear from school leaders how they were prepared, and what they need, to avoid these challenges. Moreover, this research could be of significant use to the MOE in Kuwait, especially the training and development sector, the College of Education in Kuwait University, and finally different public and private training centres that are interested in educational leadership.
E) Literature Review

There is much literature that focuses on leadership and its development in the school context. The challenge is to look at and choose from the literature what is suitable for the purpose of the study to develop the conceptual framework that will guide this research. This literature review is organized around themes involving schools leadership and their preparation and development programmes. In addition, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in the UK suggests five major issues to discuss in this field: “definitions of leadership, the importance of context, leaders' professional development, capacity building, and the need for a future orientation” (Bottery, 2004:1). This literature review will focus on three different areas that is related to the research topic, and would help the researcher to reach his aim: educational leadership in the schools context (definition and importance), the skills and qualities that would help leaders to guide their schools, and finally, leadership preparation and development programmes.

E.1) Educational leadership in school context (definitions and importance)

It is important to recognise that the definitions of education leadership have changed over time, which changes it roles and responsibilities (NIE-Singapore, 2013). In addition, there were different labels that were previously used to define this field; Gunter (as cited in Bush, 2011:5) lists them as starting with ‘educational administration’, then ‘educational management’ then finally, ‘educational leadership’. However, school leaders in Kuwait are still acting as managers (NIE-Singapore, 2013), which cannot be accepted nowadays, especially in the reforming strategy set up by the Kuwait MOE. Consequently, showing the definition of leadership would be significant to make it clear that leadership and management are not same.

There is no one actual definition of leadership (Male, 2006). However, It would also be appropriate to show examples from these definitions to help with an understanding of what this research is about.
Rauch and Behling defined leadership as “the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement” (as cited in Yukl, 2010:21); so it is important that leaders have goals so they can lead their members. Without goals there is no need for leaders; a leader’s aim is to guide people to reach goals. Moreover, leadership is:

“A process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision” (Bush & Glover, 2003:5).

Some might confuse leadership with being similar to management. However, the 21st century has shifted the school principal “from one who manages to one who innovates” (NIE-Singapore, 2013: p.110). Researchers show the differences between them. Dunford et al. (2000), for example, state that “leadership is the ability to move the school forward, whilst management is concerned with the procedures necessary to keep the school running” (p.2). Moreover, both leadership and management are necessary to have an effective school (Male, 2006; Bush, 2008, 2011); this illustrates that leadership and management are not similar, but are closely related.

School leaders “play a critical role not only in leading but transforming schools” (NIE-Singapore, 2013:32). The relationship between the quality of leadership and school effectiveness is too strong (Bush, 2008), yet Beare et al. (1989) show the importance of school leaders when they state that:

Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority. (p.99)

This statement illustrates that the quality of leadership and its effect on schools is not a new idea; it has been established for a long time. School leaders provide a clear vision for the school. They give attention to the staff and teachers and know exactly what are their weaknesses and strengths in order to provide a safe environment in the school that will have impact on the
students’ learning (Day & Sammons, 2013; Coates, 2008). Consequently, leaders are important in schools.

E.2) Leadership qualities and skills

This paper demonstrated in the previous section the importance of leadership and how schools need effective leaders. This section focuses on the skills and the personal qualities that could help leaders to guide their schools effectively and safely.

There are no simple solutions to the skills and qualities that leaders need (Male, 2006). However, educators try to establish a range of skills that should be part of a leader’s personality.

For example, the National Standards for Headteachers that were established by the Department for Education and Skills in (2004) identify six key areas that school leaders need to achieve. These include: “Shaping the future, Leading learning and teaching, Developing self and working with others, Managing the organisation, Securing accountability, and finally Strengthening community”. Yet, every key area has skills that are related to it: for example, creating vision is a skill that is related to ‘Shaping the future’. Moreover, Day and Sammons (2013:6) identify four skill areas for leadership:

“Influencing skills (motivating people, negotiating, public speaking and entrepreneurial), Learning skills (rapid reading, thinking skills, information processing and anticipation), Facilitating skills (listening, recognising potential, team building, building alliances), and Creative skills (envisioning, inspiring, empowering and aligning).”

Day and Sammons identify more skills in every area, which makes this account more comprehensive than the previous one. Furthermore, Coleman & Glover (2010) focus on the skills that are associated with leadership in education and list a number of skills that they believe could help leaders in their daily work (Communication, Decision-making, Motivation, Delegation, Working with and through teams, Meetings, and finally Managing time and stress). Beside, school leaders need to be trained in the latest theory and leadership practices, and to be connecting to international networking and programmes (NIE-Singapore, 2013). Yet, school leaders do not need just
skills; they need more than that, such as more knowledge of educational leadership and its field.

This section illustrates that leaders require a higher level of quality. Organizations should prepare and develop leaders well to enhance these qualities; this what the literature review will discuss in the next section.

**E.3) Preparation and development leadership programmes**

In some countries the tradition is that the school principal only needs teaching experience to be an effective leader. However, this is not acceptable nowadays; being a school leader is very different from being a teacher (Bush, 2008; Male, 2006). Leadership requires specific preparation (Bush, 2008) and there is increasing improvement in the preparation and development of heads on the educational agenda (Earley & Bubb, 2007).

“Preparing school principals for their responsibilities has become the focus in many educational systems” (Alansary, 2012:4). In countries such as Canada and the United States it is not possible to be a school principal without having an approved master’s degree in education administration (Bush, 2008). This illustrates that preparing school leaders is important; schools can not reach to excellence without a good principal who is well prepared.

School leaders could be developed and prepared in different ways. Yukl (2010) designed three different approaches that would help in understanding leaders’ development: “formal training, development activities, and self-help activities” (p.423). Moreover, Yukl explains and sets different ways to develop and prepare individuals for these three approaches. For example, “a short workshop at a training centre, and a management course at a university” (p.424) are related to the formal training approach.

Bush and Jackson (2002) visited different leadership centres in seven countries and reported on the availability of professional development for experienced principals. Moreover, in England, the NCSL takes responsibility for leadership development programmes (Bush, 2011); in 2001 more than 7,000 heads had participated in their programmes (Bush, 2008). In Singapore
there is “Diploma in Departmental Management (DDM) It is a 17-week full-time programme that enhances the capability of heads of department” (ibid:70). These examples not only illustrate the significance of preparation and development, but more than that, they show that it should be the established leadership programmes provided through professional centres that have the responsibility to deal with school leaders.

The National Institute of Education in Singapore (NIE – Singapore) carried out ‘A Diagnostic Study of Education in Kuwait’ in 2013. This study reviewed all of the educational sector in Kuwait, and one of the sectors that they studied was school leaders and their preparation programmes. This study found that 45.7% of Kuwait Ministry of Education (MOE) officers “do not consider the preparation of school principals as sufficient”. Moreover, “88.1% of the officers rate the programs as insufficient and 83.3% rate the quality of the leadership training programs as low”. Diagrams 1 and 2 illustrate their findings (NIE- Singapore, 2013: 113,114).

![Diagram 1: MOE Officers’ Perceptions of Sufficiency of Leadership Preparation](image-url)
The study ended with interesting findings. The majority of MOE officers are not happy with the school principals preparation, in the same time they have the authority to make it better, this could reflect that the MOE officers are not interesting in preparing school principals. However, the study shows the MOE officers’ views and does not show the school leaders’ views in their preparation, which this research aims to do.

Furthermore, in a PhD thesis by Alansari (2012) the purpose of the study was to “identify professional educational program standard for public school principals in Kuwait from the point of view of Kuwaiti educators” (ibid: 6). This study used a survey that consisted of 54 questions that addressed 10 educational leadership programme standards, which were “vision, school culture and instructional learning, management and operation, community relations, context ethics, context politics and law, technology, research, internship and mentoring, and, lastly, worldview” (p.18). These 10 standard are not created for the Kuwait context. However, the findings of the study show that Kuwaiti educators accepted all 10 standards and that they think it is important for education leadership programming (ibid). This study and its finding are significant in this field; these 10 standards could help the Kuwait MOE to build its preparation programmes.

In conclusion, through this literature review has been made clear the meaning of leadership and its significance in schools, and that if we need successful
schools we should have effective leaders. School leaders need specific skills that will help them to guide their schools and which should be achieved through professional programmes. A good school has never been guided by weak leaders; good schools need strong leaders that are prepared well (NIE-Singapore, 2013)

**F) Conceptual Framework**

The literature review helped to reach the framework that will guide this research. Through reviewing the literature, it has become clear that to have successful schools we need effective leaders. School leaders need to be involved in preparation and development programmes; through these programmes school leaders will gain more skills and knowledge related to their role and will increase their quality. Just by using these programmers we could have effective leaders that would be able to guide the schools to excellence.
G) Methodology

As was mentioned previously in the literature review, the quality of school principals has a significant effect on their role as school leaders in Kuwait. School principals need good professional preparation and development to gain these qualities, and this research aims to get close to school principals to understand from their point of view what they need to be prepared well. Therefore, this study addresses these research questions:

1. What qualities do school principals need to lead public schools in Kuwait?
2. What programmes and experiences are currently available to develop prospective principals?
3. What experiences and training would help prepare school principals to lead public schools in Kuwait?

This section is concerned with the research methodology. It will explain the research approach and the strategies that will be followed to collect data. The sampling design and the sampling size will be discussed.

G.1) Research approach

There are a number of different approaches towards educational research that have been debated among scholars. The traditional approaches in this field are commonly referred to as qualitative research and quantitative research (Bryman 1988; Morrison 2012; Thomas 2013; Robson 2011; Neuman, 2006). These two approaches refer to two major philosophical paradigms “positivism and interpretivism” (Thomas, 2013:106). Each paradigm has its own way of seeking knowledge and using this knowledge, which has an impact on the research approach taken to gather data. Consequently, the quantitative approach is based on the positivist paradigm, and the qualitative approach is based on the interpretivist paradigm (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), which makes the two approaches
differ from each other.

The qualitative approach essentially focuses on meaning while the quantitative approach essentially focuses on behaviour. In addition, Blaikie (2000) states:

Quantitative methods are generally concerned with counting and measuring aspects of social life, while qualitative methods are more concerned with producing discursive descriptions and exploring social actors’ meanings and interpretations (p.232)

Blaikie's statement shows the differing emphasis of each approach: with the quantitative approach being interested with measuring and quantifying, this approach places more value on numbers and statistics. However, qualitative approach is interested in describing and exploring, so it uses words to reach its aims, explain issues and to understand the world. Moreover, the difference between the qualitative and quantitative approaches is that each of them reflects different philosophical positions, and choosing between them is a technical decision which will be made according to the aim of the research (Bryman, 1988).

Researchers should make their choice in terms of the appropriateness of each approach to their questions (Robson, 2011; Thomas, 2013; Bryman, 1988), because every question has a specific way of finding an answer. As Robson states, “some kinds of research question appear to call for a quantitative approach, others for a qualitative one” (2011: 25). So it is the question that guides the researcher to take a particular approach, and not the reverse.

In this regard, the qualitative style helps researchers to understand answers with ‘How’ and ‘What’ questions (Neuman, 2006) as is the case in this piece of research. The purpose of this approach is to “understand what is happening in that context” (Male, 2015) that the researcher is interested in. Procedures in the qualitative approach are more open and flexible (Blaikie, 2000); this is because “qualitative research is a process, not an event, and it is virtually impossible to separate yourself from what you are seeing unlike, say, a laboratory experiment” (Male, 2015) which helps arrive at an in-depth
understanding of the topic.

Bryman defines the qualitative approach as “the study of the social world which seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied” (1988:46). However, qualitative approaches “are best understood as data enhancers”; they help researchers to search for the “hidden meaning” (Have, 2004:5). The qualitative approach helps the researcher create rich descriptions of the social sphere which are seen to be of value (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In accordance with the discussion above, the qualitative approach was judged suitable for this research. This approach helped me fulfil the research aims, and helped me to understand more about what school leaders think about their preparation; to understand from their point of view what qualities they need to guide schools in Kuwait by examining their knowledge, their feelings and their experience. Moreover, interviews, observations and focus groups are examples of data collection tools using the qualitative approach (Robson, 2011; Neuman, 2006; Bryman, 1988; Have, 2004).

**G.2) Data collection tools**

Which tools to use for collecting data is one of the biggest decisions that the researcher needs to make while they are preparing and planning for their research project (Denscombe, 2010). The interview is one qualitative data collecting tool. Moreover it is one of the popular tools that have been used in educational research, and researchers are increasingly frequently using interviews to get their information (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Robson, 2011).

By referring to the literature, scholars have presented mostly similar meanings of the interview. For example, Gillham (2000) defines it as:

> An interview is a conversation, usually between two people. But it is a conversation where one person - the interviewer - is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person the interviewee (p:1).

Moreover, the interview “is a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out
... asking people directly about what is going on” (Robson, 2011: 280). So it is clear from these different definitions that the interview is a conversation between the researcher and another person – respondent or participant – and in this conversation the researcher asks questions that reflect what they are trying to find out to get answers that will help them to collect some information (Tuckman, 1994; Yin 2009); through these questions the researcher can “search for depth of understanding” (Male, 2015).

Considering these benefits, it was decided to use this tool for collecting the data for this research, which aims to get closer to the research participants to explore their attitudes, opinions, and thoughts relating to school leaders’ preparation and development.

Wragg (2012) identified that the structured interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured interview are the basic forms of interview. These three forms were found to be the most popular types of interview. Structured interviews are another facet of the questionnaire; however, they allow direct contact between the researcher and the respondent, with a controlled format of questions that are mostly open-ended or closed questions (Denscombe, 2010; Thomas, 2013). The semi-structured interview is more flexible; the researcher has a list of topics or issues to cover together with the interviewee (Robson, 2011; Thomas, 2013). This type of interview gives the researcher more “freedom in the sequencing of questions” (Robson, 2011:285). Moreover, the semi-structured interview is “a key technique in 'real-world' research” (Gillham, 2000:21) and this why it is more likely to be used to gather qualitative data (Blaikie, 2000). In contrast, the unstructured interview is “an open situation, having greater flexibility and freedom” (Cohen et al., 2013: 414-415) than the semi-structured interview; it focuses on the chosen topic in general, letting the respondent give their ideas and their thoughts (Thomas, 2013; Denscombe, 2010).

In accordance with the information above, the semi-structured interview was used in this research project, as it could be the “richest single source of data” (Gillham, 2000: 65). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are the most favoured tools in educational research (Wragg, 2002). In addition, this type
allows the respondent to use their own words and develop their thoughts, which helps the researcher understand complex issues.

Kvale (1996) argue that effective interviewers are those who have personal skills and an adequate knowledge of the subject that they are interested in. In this regard, the researcher read about the subject and practiced interviewing in order to gain the skills that would help him guide the interview process. Questions were carefully shaped using direct and indirect questions, and focused on exploring participant attitudes towards the preparation that is currently available to them, and the qualities that they think are necessary to lead schools in Kuwait. Moreover, questions that might annoy participants were avoided. School principals were asked to participate in this project and their answers were recorded; 45 minutes to one hour was a suitable length for each interview. This was due to school principals not being familiar with such processes as these interviews, which meant more time needed to be taken to explain the process and some subject they did not have knowledge of to them.

G.3) Sampling design
Sampling is one of the most important and difficult tasks in research. Cohen et al. (2013) claimed that the quality of a piece of research might depend on the suitability of the sampling strategy that was used in the research. Scholars have defined two different type of sampling: probability sampling, and non-probability sampling (Blaikie, 2000; Cohen et al. 2013; Robson, 2011).

The choice of probability or non-probability sampling is according to the research design. Qualitative research mostly goes with non-probability sampling, as the aim of this approach is to gain an in-depth understanding which is viewed as being more important than a generalized view. Regarding this, non-probability sampling has been chosen for this research; it would have been difficult to include all school principals in Kuwait City due to time and availability constraints, and other considerations. Furthermore, quota sampling, dimensional sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling are all non-probability sampling techniques (Robson, 2011). Therefore, in
order to collect the necessary data for this research, purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used.

**G.3.1) Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling is a commonly used non-probability sampling method, which is often used in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2013; Blaikie, 2000). In addition,

A purposive sample has been chosen for a specific purpose. In many cases purposive sampling is used in order to access 'knowledgeable people', i.e. those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, maybe by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise or experience (Cohen et al., 2013: 157).

In this case, principals who are leading intermediate schools in Kuwait City were selected to be participants in this research.

**G.3.2) Snowball sampling**

Blaikie (2000) states, “Once contact is made with one member of the network, that person can be asked to identify other members and their relationship” (p.205). In this way every participant provides key access to others from which the researcher will create his sample. As gaining access to schools in Kuwait is not easy due to Kuwaiti culture and other considerations, the researcher used snowball sampling to have easy access to schools. School principals would not have participated in this research and would not have welcomed the researcher if he had not had a recommendation from one of their colleagues.

**G.3.3) Sample size**

The non-probability method may not be representative, and findings may not be generalizable. Generalizing findings was not the aim of this research; the aim was “to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it” (Cohen et al., 2013: 157). There is no rule how large the size of the sample should be; there are some factors which may act as restrictions on sample size, such as “time and resource limitation” (Blaikie, 2000: 213) and
“fitness of purpose” (Cohen et al., 2013: 157). In addition, Wragg states, “a better plan would be to select a small number of people for intensive interview” (2002: 154). As a result, this research used purposive and snowball sampling methods to interview 10 principals in order to answer the research questions.

G.4) Authenticity and trustworthiness

The value of qualitative research depends on its authenticity and trustworthiness, as these reflect the quality of the research. In traditional research these factors are called validity and reliability. However, Lincoln and Guba (1984, 1986) argue with Lincoln (1995) that qualitative research needs to replace quantitative notions of validity with authenticity, and reliability with trustworthiness.

The following steps were taken to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of this study. First, the interview questions were negotiated and discussed with the researcher’s supervisor, other experts in the field, and a pilot interview was done with one school principal in order to improve and evaluate the interview questions. Furthermore, since the interview was in Arabic, the interview question was translated from English to Arabic by qualified translators who have experience in the educational field.

H) Limitations and Conclusion

There are some clear limitations in this research. Firstly, the sample size and the sample design: this research will cover just 10 intermediate school principals so this research will not include secondary schools. Secondly, there is a limitation in the English-language literature about educational leadership related to the Kuwaiti context. Finally, there is a time limitation; I am doing my research in London and have limited time in Kuwait to do the interviews.

The hope is that this research will reach its aims, with the interviews helping me to know more about the capabilities of the participants and providing a helpful reference point for Kuwaiti school leaders.
I) References


