Leadership in Saudi Arabian Public Schools: Time for Devolution?

Fatehyah Algarni and Trevor Male

Abstract: *This paper reviews models and constructs of leadership in order to examine critically the role of educational leaders in supporting learning and development in Saudi Arabian public schools. The main conclusion reached is that the current system views educational leadership as the responsibility of a single person and suggests maintenance rather than development and management rather than leadership. Whilst there is now a governmental policy aspiration to implement collaborative learning, this seems contradictory to their way of leading Saudi education, which models a centralised decision-making culture inside educational settings. The construct of pedagogical leadership is therefore suggested as a way to change the culture of teaching and learning in Saudi schools, and the principal recommendation is to reform the Saudi public school system in order to give more flexibility and autonomy to leaders to be able to cope with the continuously changing demands of learning and knowledge development.*

Introduction

This paper investigates the challenges and possibilities presented to school leaders in Saudi Arabia by a new vision and strategy that has been proposed by the government for the future of education (Tatweer 2010). Whilst the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been successful in establishing a free formal education system that has led to universal primary education, greater access to education for both men and women and increasing adult literacy rates, the education system faces new challenges, many of which:

> are the result of advances in information and communication technologies, and increased globalization and competition among nations, which has created demand for skills that the Saudi Education needs to promote (Tatweer 2010: 4).

Such demands have been met in other nations through a focus on the qualities and behaviours of educational leaders, which have been demonstrated to be significant factors for the successful operation of educational institutions and the attainment of students (e.g. Waters, Marzano & McNulty 2003; Leithwood & Levin 2005). This consideration has resulted in abundant studies and research on leadership in education with regards to its definition, theories and the differences between leadership and management, as well as the roles leaders play in fulfilling the purposes of their organisations.

The intention of this policy statement by the Saudi government is to make student learning a central concern and to redefine the roles of schools, districts and the Ministry of Education (MoE) in supporting students' development and growth. The overriding aim of this initiative is 'to provide students with 21st century capabilities and attitudes that will help them grow into productive citizens who engage with the rest of the world positively' (Tatweer 2010: 4). The intention of this policy is to focus not just on academic attainment, therefore, but to also include the development of students in dimensions related to their physical attributes, mental predispositions and citizenship, outcomes that 'will help the Kingdom strengthen its competitiveness in the 21st century' (ibid.).

The principal mechanism for achieving such an ambition is the devolution of much decision-making from central government to the districts and, ultimately, to the schools that will be expected to have the capacity and autonomy to design, plan, evaluate and lead their own development and to be focused on student learning, with the principals and teachers being effective change agents. Such an approach runs contrary to the nature of Arabic society, however, particularly to that found within the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia is the heartland of Islam and the guardian of the two holy mosques, and the kingdom's constitution and law are based on the Quran (holy book) and Sharia (Islamic law), overlays which mean that religion permeates every aspect of life. The context is significant, it is argued, when exploring the ways in which formal leaders are able to operate, as most decision-making, particularly in policy terms, has previously been centralised and culturally constrained (Alameen, Male & Palaiologou 2014).

Most studies of leadership conducted in non-learning-based organisations such as in business and politics, and particularly those in westernised countries, and are not always applicable to different cultures (Hofstede 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997). Subsequently, very few studies have explored the application of leadership and management principles developed in a western democratised environment to other cultures, and especially to Arab states dominated by Islam. For this study, for example, despite an extensive search of literature very few published articles on this topic were discovered (even when searching those written in Arabic) and unpublished doctoral dissertations proved the most productive source of information outside of government documentation.

The Saudi Arabian School System

Based on a belief that 'the individual citizen has the duty for the pursuit of learning and the state's duty is to provide learning for its citizens', the MoE represents the government in providing and supervising free general education for all residents (MoE 2004: 6). This includes producing the national curriculum (NC), issuing policies, providing training programmes and evaluating the educational performance of schools, leaders, teachers and students at various stages. This demonstrates how the Saudi school system has been highly standardised and centralised.

The academic year comprises two semesters, and the daily timetable in Saudi public schools consists of seven 45-minute periods. Headteachers are responsible for planning and dividing these periods according to given guidance on the number of periods for each subject. They are also responsible for monitoring teachers' weekly plans and ensuring fulfilment of the NC, which includes a wide range of academic subjects, each of which also encompass social, cultural and religious values (Al-Hugail 1999; Al-Hamed, Al-Utaibi, Zeeadah & Mitwally 2007). Saudi teachers are formally obliged to implement the NC and are provided with very detailed, static and prescribed curricula, yet at the same time they are expected to facilitate the learning process creatively, enrich the environment and develop functioning teaching strategies for all learners, inspiring their thinking, imagination and

learning (Al-Aqeel 2005). Saudi curricula may thus be considered to be overcrowded to the extent that leaders may have difficulty covering the stipulated contents in the time available. There are also difficulties in personalising learning, since the current approach is curriculum-centred, with the implication that all must accomplish the same activities and undergo similar assessments.

Strong criticism has been expressed on need for curricula to encompass social, cultural and religious values, seeing it as 'mental terrorism against intellectual, innovation and creativity of teachers' (Sayed 2010: 87). One of the challenges invoked by the new government strategy, therefore, is how to liberate districts, schools and individual educators from such a deterministic regime. This also has its impact on the type of leadership, which can be described as learning-centred rather than learner-centred, as the latter may involve notions of individualising learning. This distinction will be explored more fully later in this paper.

The Role of Saudi Teachers

Teachers are continually required to update and improve their competences, training, and qualifications in order to be suitably equipped for this unremittingly evolving field (Al-Salloom 1996; Al-Sunbul 2008). This training has often been organised by the MoE and carried out in Educational Supervision Offices (local authorities), where educational supervisors hold workshops and lectures to promote teachers' knowledge and competence. Leaders' attendance of such workshops is not motivated by promotions or encouragement, however, which might affect their enthusiasm towards these programmes. The new government strategy intimates, however, that teachers should see their role as exceeding the formal teaching of academic curricula in order to embrace positive relationships with their pupils/students based on trust and similar to that between parents and their children (Al-Salloom 1996; Al-Sunbul 2008). This will entail respect and fair treatment to all learners, ensuring their moral growth and encouraging their social development and the acquisition of important skills and values, such as collaboration and respect.

The Role of the Headteacher

According to Alhamzi (2010), the MoE specifies the roles and responsibilities of headteachers, among which are:

- accountability for preparing the school environment
- having a comprehensive understanding of the objectives of education and awareness of the characteristics of pupils/students at the stage they serve
- organising resources and equipment
- maintaining good relationships with students, teachers and parents
- supervising the school's provision through carrying out observations and assessments of teachers' and students' performance
- setting up appropriate plans for the short- and long-term targets.

Safety and security are also emphasised, as are the promotion of positive relationships with the community and helping learners to understand their social context and to learn cultural and social values that are important to consider during various interactions inside and outside of school (Al-Sunbul 2008). The duties of headteachers also include learning-related tasks such as monitoring the fulfilment of the curriculum and student assessment, as well as liaising with parents in order to improve their children's attainment or to overcome difficulties they face.

This raises two important considerations. First, the MoE appears to combine the role of leader and manager, and appears to confine both roles to the headteacher. The highly structured, centralised system in KSA thus leaves less opportunity for school autonomy and impacts on creativity and competitiveness among schools. This may encourage centralisation within schools, since all decisions are expected to be made by the headteacher rather than distributing responsibilities and encouraging collaboration and creativity. Moreover, as AlKarni (2009) points out, these instructions and guidance overwhelm headteachers with administrative tasks and accountabilities, affecting their focus on developing their professionalism as leaders of educational and learning organisations. Second, it shows that school leadership in KSA can be typified as learning-centred, since it emphasises learning outcomes that are measured by examinations and formal assessments, rather than the personalisation of learning which is the distinctive feature of the learner-centred leader.

The Challenges for Educational Leadership in Saudi Arabian Schools

Reducing the role expectation of headteachers and developing the capability of others within the school thus appear to be the main challenges if the desire is to move from a learning-centred to a learner-centred approach. Saudi educationalists, such as Al-Buraidi (2006), argue that effective leaders contribute to inspiring educational provision and supporting adults' lifelong learning through helping parents, community and decision-makers to comprehend children's learning and development. Likewise, learner-centred leaders support teachers and practitioners to gain practical teaching strategies and engage in reflective practice (Al-Yahya 2004). Duhn (2011) comments that leaders should be aware of the learning needs of children and adults in school and create operative techniques to meet these needs. Accordingly, and because knowledge constantly changes and evolves (Gardner 2006; Armstrong 2009), Saudi schools should seek to construct a learning culture and model lifelong learning, inspiring staff and children to develop capacities for continuing learning. Male (2006) suggests, however, that 'building an effective learning environment is beyond the efforts of one person, so the key task of headship is to build the capability of others to exhibit learner-centred leadership at all levels of the school' (p. 170).

From a western perspective, Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Dutton & Kleiner (2000) and Evans (2003) suggest that educational leaders play a significant role in building a philosophy of teamwork amongst their followers, preserving positive relationships through maintaining a balance between individualities, work culture and shared goals. This concept of a collaborative partnership supports team members in coping with the educational demands in terms of policies and practices (McBer, Forde, Hobby & Lees 2000). This provides children with the opportunity to work as partners within a stimulating atmosphere with constructive interactions, which enable them to convey their experiences and master skills within a balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities. Furthermore, it enables children to make a positive contribution, be emotionally and socially healthy, and enjoy and achieve advanced levels of learning and development (Dean 2009). In Saudi schools, however, this philosophy of teamwork is still in need of further consideration, as teachers tend to use competition to motivate learning, which limits the benefits of cooperative learning inside classrooms.

Educational leaders should therefore aim to guide and facilitate the learning process through participating in children's activities, supporting their language development and acquisition of social and communicative skills through verbal interaction (Vygotsky 1962), and motivating their intellectual, physical, creative, social and emotional capabilities through allowing them to observe and imitate their leaders as role models (Bandura 1977; Drake 2005). This can be seen in Saudi

educational settings, particularly in kindergartens and early primary stages, where the focus on language and social development are dominant themes. Unlike western schools, however, there is insufficient time for free activities and play in Saudi schools, which may limit physical activity, creativity, imagination, confidence, social interactions and, perhaps, enjoyment (Bruce, 2001; Jenkinson 2001; Rich 2005; Williams 2009). Although leaders in Saudi schools may be aware of such consequences, they feel they do not have the power to change this situation due to their understanding of the MoE's intention to give priority to academic achievements.

Effective performance of educational leaders entails organising time and space, because learners should experience a variety of learning activities as well as enjoyment (Jones & Pound 2008). Equally, the structure of space impacts on children's motivation to enjoy learning (Blandford 2006). The learning environment should be supplied with a wide spectrum of facilities, organised according to the planned learning activities with consideration of learners' ages and interests. Levačić (2010) adds that resources influence learners' attainment, and leaders should therefore ensure the provision and fair distribution of learning resources amongst all learners. Thus they are responsible for evaluating the relevance, effectiveness and adequacy of resources to fulfil learning outcomes and achieve the standards of education expected by legislators; this can be seen as one of the most challenging duties of leaders in Saudi schools

A major challenge that faces Saudi educational leaders, for example, is the lack of learning resources in both rented and purpose-built schools. Some leaders respond by buying resources at their own expense, because they are aware of the benefits of such resources for learning attainment but are not supported by the MoE in providing such materials (Al-Maini 2006). In some instances, residential buildings are rented to function as schools, but the size of the classrooms may not be comfortable for the large number of pupils/students, or helpful for teachers to implement various strategies that may necessitate learners moving around the classroom. However, leaders are not allowed to undertake any adjustment to the premises in order to fulfil educational purposes (Al-Buraidi 2006). These buildings therefore lack safety facilities, such as emergency exits. Furthermore, the use of rented buildings and leaders' lack of autonomy over them have resulted in the absence of some learning facilities in these buildings, such as libraries or ICT laboratories.

The challenge of organising time is not as problematic as organising space because the number of periods and amount of curricula that are required to be covered makes the daily routine quite fixed. Consequently, learners can predict what will happen in each period, although they may not face creative challenges. Moreover, some of them complete the curricular exercises in their textbooks before coming to school. To organise something new or different, leaders will therefore need to be more flexible with time and space to allow more creativity and enjoyment in their lessons.

In addition, a central mission of leaders is to provide children with a stimulating environment, in which their learning, imagination and interests are challenged and expanded by motivating materials (Bruce & Meggitt 2002). This requires consideration of socio-cultural backgrounds, the biological stages of children's development and the learning content when planning activities (Bruce 2005). This demonstrates leaders' commitment to providing children with an enabling, yet safe, environment (DCSF 2008). By doing so, educators encourage learners to express their ideas, needs and feelings confidently, as they feel secure and assured that their needs are recognised and understood by their leaders. Such recognition of the basic human need for belonging, acceptance and security (Maslow 1970) enables leaders to understand their role in ensuring each child's safety and health. Saudi leaders, however, struggle with this issue. First, the above-mentioned condition of buildings, especially rented ones, does not meet the basic standards of safety demands. Second,

for safety and security reasons, educational leaders are unable to organise some learning activities, such as scientific experiments and school trips, because of demanding regulations and instructions that affect leaders' enthusiasm towards such activities, limiting their autonomy and creativity as well as learning opportunities for pupils/students. Filer (2008) suggests that children should be allowed to take reasonable risks and face new challenges in order to gain new experiences and develop their knowledge further. Furthermore, as leaders follow guidelines and respect limits, they serve as role models who help children to learn social skills and to understand how rules are important in schools and in the wider world, as well as the consequences of breaking these boundaries (Jonson & Bush 2005). If Saudi leaders were encouraged to organise trips and to allow learners to take responsible risks, this would be more beneficial and educative than avoiding such activities completely.

In recognition of the complexity of dealing with a variety of ages, backgrounds and personalities, Curtis & O'Hagan (2003) suggest that leaders should be equipped with a good psychological understanding of child development. A knowledge of child development is important for understanding the issues and processes underpinning children's learning and development and for producing appropriate learning opportunities (Vygotsky 1997; Smith, Cowie & Blades 2003; Ford 2004; Snowman & Biehler 2006). Rhodes & Brundett (2010) argue that traditional learning theories suggest two conflicting views: teacher-centred (top-down) or pupil-centred (bottom-up). Yet cognitivist theorists recommend partnership as a way of maintaining a balance between both approaches to inspire educators to cooperate and lead the learning process fruitfully. In Saudi schools, despite the policies that urge the implementation of collaborative learning, the traditional methods – for example, didactic teaching and learners sitting in rows receiving information – are still used (Algarfi 2005, 2010). This is exacerbated by a focus on the memorisation of curricular information (Al-Dawod 2004). This method of transmitting knowledge does not help learners to construct knowledge in their own way. Hence, there is a need to change the school culture in relation to teaching and learning towards an approach that acknowledges the impact of culture and classroom context on students' learning.

This may be achieved through adopting the construct of pedagogical leadership, which builds on previous work in the field of education relating to learning-centred and learner-centred leadership approaches through seeking to take account of personal and local learning needs, as well those relating to organisational and systemic (national) needs. Pedagogical leadership thus extends the notion of learner-centred leadership (which itself was a much more personalised approach than typically employed in learning-centred approaches) to encompass the ecology of the community as well as the individual learner. Such an approach, it is argued, inspires learners to develop their learning interests beyond quantitatively measured learning outcomes to be concerned 'with the learning of themselves, and the learning of the team and of the community' and 'with the situational justifications that derive from the context at a certain time' to facilitate learners understanding and judgement and inform their 'decisions about future directions' (Male & Palaiologou 2012:116). However, the shift to pedagogical leadership would need to be at both the macro and micro levels of Saudi education, because school leaders may not be able to make this change, while the MoE is still making standardised educational decisions across all schools, regardless of the individual state of each setting. Leaders of each school, it is thus argued, should be entitled to make necessary changes in their schools and adopt appropriate strategies to promote teaching and learning that correspond to the needs of the student body they serve.

Leadership Theories and Constructs

Conceptualising leadership entails an exploration of the distinction between leadership and management, since some educationalists use both notions interchangeably (Jones & Pound 2008). Others differentiate leadership from management, connecting leadership to shared principles and to the creation of values and vision and the initiation of change (Coleman & Glover 2010), and management to technical issues and the implementation of policies and curriculum as well as the production of strategic plans and the making of decisions (Jones 2005). The managers' role, therefore, concerns maintenance rather than change to ensure the day-to-day authorisation of the vision (Cuban 1988), whereas leaders are concerned with generating long-term plans for quality and providing motivation and direction to followers. Visionary leadership and effective management, however, are complementary, inseparable and equally important for schools' effectiveness (Hall 1996; Busher 2006: Davies 2011). Professional management skills are necessary, but not sufficient, for effective leadership because the emphasis on management may imply a means of upholding the status quo rather than generating innovative approaches (Bloom 2003). In contrast, leadership focuses on collaboration amongst all people involved in order to improve provision (Carr, Johnson & Corkwell 2009), although it may incorporate management responsibilities (Crawford 2003). Male concludes in earlier work that 'any organisation needs a combination of leadership, management and administration in order to run effectively and efficiently' (2006: 3).

Educational theorists in western countries thus suggest that leadership behaviours should be situational and contingent on context and circumstance (e.g. Southworth 2002; Male 2006). Believing that different styles of leadership are needed for different contexts and occasions, Fidler (2002) states that 'leadership is a complex area with many apparently contradictory requirements, [and that] suggestions that particular approaches to leadership should be universal ... should be resisted' (p. 32). Yukl (2002) similarly argues that 'the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective' (p. 4), although he acknowledges the usefulness of some definitions over others. Most perspectives on leadership, nevertheless, connect this concept to the ability to influence the behaviour of others, to deal with difficulties, to respond creatively, to contribute to the overall development of the organisation and to lead followers towards achieving clear objectives (Bush 2011).

In educational contexts, Bush (2008) asserts that influence rather than authority is the a central characteristic of leadership, adding that this influence is intentional as it aims to achieve certain goals, and that it can be exercised by individuals or a group of leaders. Southworth (2002) argues that leadership is "socially constructed" and is something substantially greater than the tasks associated with formal leadership (p. 74). Leadership, instead, is a social interaction in which one person influences the motivation or competencies of others in the group (Bass 1981). Consequently, anyone can be a leader as the definition automatically concludes there will be followers who choose to be influenced according to a variety of motivational triggers. The power of formal leadership encompasses the right to administer sanctions, but such an approach has consistently been demonstrated to be the least effective in establishing long-term change in the behaviour of others (Goleman 2000). Effective leadership instead requires the commitment of a core group to the same values, aims and priorities and the similar positive engagement of a critical mass of other organisational members (Senge 1990).

These perspectives on defining leadership, identifying the purposes that leadership pursues and distinguishing it from management have resulted in generations of theories of leadership that have sought to understand how leadership is endorsed, who can be a leader, and how they can

be effective. Older generations of theories included trait theories, behavioural theories, situational or contingency theories and transactional theories (Fiedler & Garcia 1987; Horne & Stedman-Jones 2001; Van Maurik 2001; Turner & Muller 2005), all of which stemmed from either a belief in leaders' innate abilities and competencies, or a postulation of an organisational hierarchy where leadership is vested in fixed positions, as the way to successful leadership. Transformational theorists were more holistic in theorising leadership, however, as they tried to combine organisational development with followers' commitment to the intentions of the organisation. Bass (1985) regarded transformational leaders as change agents who promote followers' awareness and commitment towards shared purposes and the ways to achieve them, motivating followers to subsume their own interests for the advantage of the organisation (Gill 2006).

As indicated earlier, these theories were typically based on occupations other than education, however, which meant their application in educational settings required modification to suit the nature of these contexts (Davies 2009; Bush 2011). Hardy, Arthur, Jones, Shariff & Munnoch (2010) and Davies (2009) assert that transformational leadership's contribution to students' and organisational learning is empirically evident, as it has a positive influence on individuals' self-esteem and organisational outcomes. Hence, Leithwood & Jantzi (1990, 2000, 2006, 2009) suggested an educational model of transformational leadership and identified three categories of practice:

- providing directions to support and motivate people to achieve the looked-for goals through shared vision
- inspiring leaders' emotional intelligence to help them increase employees' competences and school performance, as well as encouraging people to take responsibility and develop high levels of enthusiasm to promote the quality of teaching and learning
- reshaping the organisational culture and structure to enhance learning performance amongst students and professionals.

These variations in the way leadership is viewed have resulted in a generation of theory that emphasises the sharing of responsibilities and decision-making. Democratic leadership, for example, depends upon participation and consultation (Woods 2004) based on democratic values, such as delegating more flexibility to followers to act creatively in different situations rather than confining all the power to a single hierarchical leader (Gronn 2010). Distributed leadership, meanwhile, highlights the value of benefiting from different expertise where needed, regardless of the formal position of those possessing such expertise (Harris 2002, 2004). Distributed leadership in educational settings focuses on leaders' interactions and their influence on their followers and context, in which leaders play multiple roles including encouraging productive communication, reinforcing relations between their setting and the community, motivating staff, organising activities and, most importantly, creating and supporting a learning community (Rogoff, Turkanis & Bartlett 2001; Day & Schmidt 2007). Harris (2010) views distributed leadership in education as 'a potential contributor to positive organisational change and improvement' and provides empirical evidence suggesting that it is 'an important co-effect of school improvement processes' which improve student learning outcomes (pp. 57-58).

Instructional leadership is a model of educational leadership that focuses on impact (Hopkins 2003) in which the 'critical focus of attention by leaders is the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students' (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach1999: 8). This approach extends leaders' role beyond administrative affairs to involvement in building a culture of continuous learning and the sustainment of 'high expectations and standards for

students, as well as for teachers' (Hallinger 2005: 3). Using the term 'instruction', however, may result in bureaucracy when implementing change and in a de-professionalisation of teaching (Evans 1999), since the focus is on the implementation of 'a centralised and mandated curriculum and the publication of students' results' (Sachs 2003: 10). Moreover, the emphasis may convey a sense of hierarchical interaction through which headteachers intervene to enhance teachers' performance, making learning dependent on a single person rather on than sharing knowledge and distributing duties across the school (Supovitz & Poglinco 2001; McEwan 2003). Hence, instructional leadership evolved into 'learning-centred leadership', to include broader implications about the impact of leaders on their schools and learning outcomes, particularly on promoting student attainment (Southworth 2009; Rhodes & Brundett 2010). Southworth (2002) suggests that headteachers can use various strategies to influence student outcomes and offers modelling, monitoring and dialogue as the most common overlapping, interrelated and simultaneously used strategies. Modelling is about leaders setting themselves as examples, presenting their interests in learning and teaching, and exploiting every opportunity 'to promote and reinforce educational values and practices' (Southworth 2002: 84). Monitoring encompasses visiting classrooms and observing teachers' performance and implementation of school plans, curriculum and policies, then giving feedback accordingly. Dialogue is about encouraging teachers to talk and share their views about learning processes and elements, such as curricula, assessment, policies and learners. This promotes their professional, reflective capacities, expands their teaching repertoires, and strengthens their openness to continual learning from colleagues and from personal experiences (Southworth 2009).

Despite this, as Van Manen (1993) argues, it 'is possible to learn all of the techniques of instruction, but remain pedagogically unfit as a teacher' (p. 9). In a recent review of learning-centred and learner-centred approaches to educational leadership, Male & Palaiologou (2012) argue that despite the improvement of student attainment as a consequence of leaders' engagement in promoting teaching and monitoring learning provision, there is still a need to develop this model to bridge two identified gaps: the narrowing of curricula and inconsistency in the implementation of plans for improvement. Thus, they call for education systems 'to shift their emphasis onto process rather than on outcomes, to learning rather than on knowledge and to focus on developing learners' and equipping students with appropriate tools to construct, rather than transmit, knowledge in a way that suits their current circumstances and time demands (2012: 116). Based on this argument, Male & Palaiologou (2012) propose pedagogical leadership as a way to enhance the learning environment and build learning communities through maintaining positive relationships not only between teachers and learners, but also among all involved parties including parents, the community and government. This proposition was justified by identifying the relationship between pedagogy and leadership, which is rooted in the need for leaders to consider situational, social, political and cultural influences in teaching and learning processes.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has noted that despite the large number of definitions available, there is no single definition that can encompass all of the characteristics of leadership, although some can be more useful and applicable than others. A common finding in the literature of leadership is the emphasis on distinguishing leadership from management, associating leadership with influencing people, creating a vision, appreciating values, encouraging collaboration and adopting a culture of change. Management, on the other hand, is about implementing policies, equipping the organisation with

the needed resources and maintaining organisational schedules. Both leadership and management are important to ensure effective functioning of the organisation.

Researching leadership theory has also led to the discovery of a variety of models, which initially stemmed from business and political perspectives, and were then adapted to educational settings. Due to the nature of these settings, the models of leadership were modified and developed further, creating new educational models of leadership – such as distributed, transformational and instructional leadership – each of which has its advantages and shortcomings. However, there is no fixed leadership model that can be always applicable in schools, and leadership styles should be adapted according to different circumstances.

The main conclusion reached is that viewing a leader as a single person fulfilling leadership functions invokes concepts of competition and power, maintenance rather than development, and management rather than leadership. The tendency of the MoE to implement collaborative learning seems contradictory to their way of leading Saudi education, however, which does not model collaboration. Instead, it models a centralised decision-making culture inside educational settings. Since this is inconsistent with a collaborative learning culture, this paper has explored theories of leadership that emphasise sharing responsibilities, unlike the older generation of theories that emphasised the traits of individual leaders as a measure of successful organisational performance.

Amongst the recent approaches to educational leadership is the construct of pedagogical leadership, which takes into account moral, cultural, social and political dimensions when developing and encouraging learners. It suggests providing learners with tools to construct knowledge and develop learning, rather than focusing on transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next, because knowledge is not fixed, but rather evolves over time. This approach is therefore suggested as a way to change the culture of teaching and learning in Saudi schools, because the current learning-centred approach provides only a focus on test results rather than inspiring learners to construct knowledge and to be involved in designing their own learning.

The challenges and obstacles faced by educational leaders in KSA have a negative impact, however, on the support for student learning and development. The centralisation of decision-making, a lack of resources, unsuitable buildings and an overloaded curriculum impact on leaders' abilities to organise time, space and learning activities, which are significant elements for any learning environment. Hence, this paper recommends reconsidering these factors and reforming the KSA education system in order to give more flexibility and autonomy to leaders to be able to cope with the continuously changing demands of learning and knowledge development. The MoE, it is suggested, should provide educational leaders with learning-purpose-based buildings equipped with appropriate facilities, such as libraries and ICT laboratories. The size of classrooms should be consistent with the number of pupils, allowing teachers to pay more attention to individual needs and embrace modern learning techniques. The amount of curricular content should be reduced in order to allow more time to address learners' interests and to create opportunities to develop critical thinking, creativity and contemporary, concrete experiences. In this way, learners would be able to develop a sense of ownership of, and enjoy, their learning, while leaders would be able to build a pedagogically inspired learning community at schools, since the tangible focus of schools, teachers and heads should be on how, why and when learners can learn best, not on an instructional approach.

To implement pedagogical leadership appropriately, leaders in the Saudi educational context need, in addition to flexibility and autonomy, to be offered more training programmes, which should focus on important areas that have direct influence on learning and teaching, such as child

development, group dynamics, organisational theory and various teaching approaches. Training programmes should be linked to policies in order to prepare leaders to implement policies and strategies appropriately. Thus, we conclude overall that Saudi education could be enhanced if the MoE were to offer training on pedagogical leadership for educational leaders and also give them more freedom and encourage their creativity to exercise their skills and influence appropriately to the context for the benefit of the learning environment.

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Author Details

Fatehyah Algarni
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX
England
Email: nif5722714@hotmail.com

Trevor Male
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX
England
Email: T.D.Male@hull.ac.uk