

“Which Educational Leadership Strategies Influence Secondary Public-School Principals in the Hawalli Educational District (Kuwait) and why is this the case?”

Researcher:

Lulwah Alsane

University of Southampton, 2024



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ABSTRACT:

This qualitative study investigated the educational leadership strategies employed by secondary school principals in Kuwait's Hawalli Educational District. This research explores principals' perspectives on the most effective strategies, their rationale for choosing these strategies, and the influence of Hawalli Educational District policies on their leadership practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine principals, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that principals prioritise collaboration and teamwork, transparency and open communication, and flexibility and adaptability as crucial strategies for school improvement. Some principals also highlighted the importance of data-driven decision-making. These strategies were chosen for their perceived effectiveness, potential to foster a positive school culture, and alignment with a student-centred approach. However, principals also faced challenges such as school-building and infrastructure limitations, resistance to change, and the need to adapt to cultural diversity. Bureaucratic processes and limited autonomy were also identified as obstacles. The impact of Hawalli Educational District policies on leadership practices was various, with some principals finding them supportive and others restrictive. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing educational leadership in the Hawalli Educational District, including providing principals with more autonomy, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and offering targeted training and support. The study contributes to the understanding of educational leadership in the Kuwaiti context and offers insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve school leadership and student outcomes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Educational leadership is crucial for schools' success, especially in diverse settings like Kuwait's Hawalli Educational District. Principals play a key role in shaping institutions' educational pursuits and outcomes through effective leadership strategies (Bryk et al., 2010). These strategies significantly impact the quality of education and student learning (Leithwood et al., 2008). This study explores the leadership strategies employed by secondary school principals in the Hawalli Educational District and the reasons behind their practices.

The world of education is a challenging and ever-evolving landscape that demands responsive and dynamic leadership practices (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The role of school principals extends beyond administrative duties; they are functionally imagined as torchbearers of institutional expertise, nurturing pedagogical excellence, and providing motivational support to the school community (Bush & Glover, 2014). School principals employ various leadership strategies to guide their schools towards achieving educational objectives.

Educational leadership involves recruiting and directing the skills and efforts of teachers, students, and parents to achieve common educational goals (Day et al., 2010). Distinct from traditional top-down managerial styles, educational leadership, more often than not, encourages distributed leadership. Distributed leadership implies the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities across different stakeholders in a school community (Spillane, 2006).

1.2 Research purpose and questions

This study investigates the influence of educational leadership strategies in Hawalli secondary schools in Kuwait. To explore these issues, a qualitative methodology was employed to examine which educational leadership strategies influence secondary school principals in the Hawalli Educational District. The qualitative method aims to address the following research questions:

- 1- What do school principals in the Hawalli District consider the most effective educational leadership strategies for school development? and what are the reasons behind these beliefs?
- 2- How do the policies and directives established by the Hawalli Educational District influence the principals' leadership practices?

1.3 Contextual Background

Kuwait, similar to other countries, possesses an educational system governed by specific laws and regulations. These policies serve to standardise and streamline educational processes. They encompass various aspects like curriculum design and resource allocation, directly influencing school administrators' decision-making autonomy and leadership styles (Aldaihani, 2020).

Kuwait has six educational districts: Al-Asema, Al-Farwaniya, Al-Jahra, Hawalli, Al-Ahmadi, and Mubarak Al-Kabeer. The Ministry of Education established a division within each district to monitor school administration (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2011). Hawalli Educational Governorate, one of the smallest, is notable for its diversity in teacher and student nationalities despite all school principals being Kuwaiti (CSB, 2021). It comprises 20 schools, equally divided between male and female students, reflecting Kuwait's gender-segregated education system. Male principals lead boys' secondary schools, while female principals lead girls' secondary schools, which aligns with traditional and cultural norms.

Kuwait's educational policies are multifaceted, encompassing curriculum design, evaluation procedures, and resource allocation (Alsaleh, 2022). Curriculum policies dictate the educational content across schools within the district (AlKandari, 2013). These prescriptive documents outline each academic year's syllabus, learning outcomes, and educational goals. Evaluation policies define how student performance is assessed formally through exams and informally through continuous assessment (Eid & Koushki, 2005). Lastly, resource policies govern allocating financial, human, and material resources to schools, impacting the overall learning environment (Alhashem & Alhouthi, 2021).

These policies significantly impact school-level independence and decision-making, particularly for principals. The strict guidelines of curriculum policies limit principals' ability to personalise education to student needs and local context (Burney et al., 2013). Consequently, their leadership may become more bureaucratic or managerial as they prioritize compliance with established standards.

The literature reveals Alsaleh's research on instructional leadership within Kuwait's educational reform framework emphasises its significance in promoting substantial learning and efficient teaching approaches (Alsaleh, 2019). Almonawer's study on transformational leadership underscores its quantifiable influence on the transformation of secondary school education, emphasising the need for a dynamic combination of educational system reform (Almonawer, 2021).

The literature has proposed several educational leadership strategies, from transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and instructional leadership to situational leadership (Spillane & James, 2012). Although different, these strategies often intersect and are not mutually exclusive. They usually allow a more democratic and efficient flow of processes in an institution.

The significance of effective educational leadership is also reinforced by the empirical work of the Brunel University London study, as stated (Almonawer, 2021). This study demonstrates how effective leadership strongly affects school outcomes by influencing teachers' motivation and capabilities in the school climate. Similarly, another noteworthy article in the *Frontiers in Education Journal* (Carvalho et al., 2021) emphasised the role of school leaders in creating favourable conditions that enhance students' learning. This underscores how leadership styles can significantly impact students' outcomes.

While extensive, the existing research on educational leadership in Kuwait reveals several critical gaps that this study aims to address. The literature often lacks a specific focus on the unique educational context of Kuwait, particularly within the Hawalli Educational District. As Hallinger (2018) emphasises, the effectiveness of leadership strategies is contingent upon the specific context in which they are implemented. Thus, the applicability and success of globally recognised leadership models may vary considerably within the Kuwaiti setting. The literature also tends to overlook the crucial aspect of diversity, which is particularly salient in Kuwaiti schools with their multi-national teaching workforce (Al-Kandari, 2013). Effective leadership in this context necessitates strategies that acknowledge and leverage this diversity to enhance school performance.

Furthermore, there remains a disconnect between identifying effective leadership strategies and their successful implementation to improve school outcomes in Kuwait. The scarcity of studies investigating the specific leadership practices that contribute to school excellence in the Kuwaiti context, as highlighted by Hammad et al. (2022), further underscores this

gap. This presents a valuable opportunity for further research to explore the relationship between various leadership strategies and their practical implications for school improvement in Kuwait, particularly within the Hawalli Educational District. The present study aims to contribute to this discourse by examining the specific leadership practices employed by secondary public school principals in Hawalli and their impact on school performance, considering the unique contextual factors and the imperative of diversity.

Investigating leadership strategies applied in Hawalli District secondary schools can significantly contribute to education in multicultural settings. One of the most important reasons for choosing Kuwait is the gap in educational leadership research in Kuwait, specifically educational leadership strategies. Furthermore, the Hawalli teaching District has several cultures and ethnicities (CSB, 2021). Thus, school principals must be adaptable and possess various leadership skills to provide an inclusive, exciting, and thriving teaching environment. These leadership tactics must accommodate both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti students in the District's heterogeneous demography (CSB, 2021). This study aspires to provide insights into effective, contextually tailored leadership strategies and their subsequent impact on school outcomes in multicultural environments, further facilitating well-informed policy decisions on school leadership in Kuwait.

1.4 Rationale for the study

The Hawalli Educational District was purposefully chosen for this study due to its distinctive attributes. As one of the smallest governorates, it offers a manageable research setting while encompassing a diverse range of teacher and student nationalities, thereby enhancing the richness of the research findings. Additionally, the district boasts a balanced distribution of girls' and boys' high schools, ensuring unbiased insights.

In contrast to the larger and less balanced Jahra Educational District, Hawalli is well-suited for a master's research study due to the limited time frame available. Ultimately, the Hawalli District provides a rich, diverse, and manageable context for investigating the complexities of educational leadership in Kuwait. The findings from this study have the potential to inform both policy and practice across the nation.

This study is of utmost importance to educational leadership in Kuwait. When the Ministry of Education, education stakeholders and other relevant organisations obtain sufficient information on the perspectives and experiences of principals, they will gain awareness of successful leadership techniques and obstacles encountered by school leaders. This will enable them to analyse the effects of various leadership styles on school performance and actively contribute to improving and enhancing leadership practices within the Hawalli Educational District. In addition, this study will have a valuable impact on principals. Students will reflect on their practices and expertise, potentially leading to improved leadership methods and, consequently, better school outcomes.

1.5 Summary

This chapter provided a concise and thorough examination of educational leadership, including an introduction, study objectives and questions, background context, and research rationale. In Chapter 2, I will examine and analyse educational leadership techniques by considering several pieces of data and comparing and contrasting different research. Chapter 3 will expose the research theory, design, data gathering methods, and analysis. Chapter 4 will provide the study results, while Chapter 5 will analyse and explain the findings and the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

At the heart of educational improvements and reforms lies the prowess of effective leadership. Across the globe, the role of school principals, as pivotal to the education landscape, has been increasingly underscored by numerous studies on their influence on school performance. This study aims to explore educational leadership strategies in secondary public schools in the Hawalli Educational District in Kuwait and to determine the reasons for their effectiveness. To achieve this goal, this literature review presents the extant body of academic work. It highlights the essential facets of educational leadership, specifically as they pertain to the context of Kuwait.

This chapter begins by discussing the theoretical underpinnings of educational leadership and management. Subsequently, it explores research in diverse educational settings, thereby articulating school leaders' substantial influence. The chapter also dissects Kuwaiti secondary schools' distinctive cultural and organisational structures, accentuating the interplay between these factors and leadership strategies. Furthermore, an examination of the existing literature reveals a gap in the context-specific research on the efficacy of leadership in enhancing school performance within Kuwait's educational sphere. Working to fill this gap opens a pathway for future research that can deliver insights into the fabric of Kuwaiti educational leadership, ultimately promoting the existing knowledge base through empirical evidence from the Hawalli Educational District.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Educational Leadership

2.2.1 Key Leadership Theories

Comprehending educational leadership theories is essential for gaining insights into successful school administrators' leadership strategies, particularly in secondary public schools. This research explores leadership practices in the Hawalli Educational District of Kuwait by analysing the techniques used by effective principals and the underlying ideas that support them. This literature review examines the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts and their practical implementation in educational institutions.

Transformational leadership:

Transformational leadership, a prominent theory in educational leadership, emphasises the leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers towards achieving collective goals (Burns, 2012; Bass & Avolio, 1994). This approach champions a move beyond transactional exchanges, where leaders foster a shared vision, encourage intellectual stimulation, and provide individualized consideration to their followers. While research, such as that by Day et al. (2016), has demonstrated a positive correlation between transformational leadership behaviours and outcomes like increased teacher motivation and student achievement, particularly in secondary schools, it is crucial to maintain a critical lens.

The concept can be somewhat nebulous, with characteristics like charisma and idealised influence open to subjective interpretation and inconsistent measurement. This ambiguity can hinder the consistent application and evaluation of transformational leadership in practice (Yukl, 1999). It is paramount that transformational leadership remains firmly rooted in ethical principles and genuine concern for the well-being of followers (Northouse, 2022).

Additionally, while the positive impacts of transformational leadership in education are evident, its effectiveness may be contingent on the specific context and organisational culture (Bryman, 1992). Recognising that other leadership styles may be more suitable in certain situations is crucial. The theory has also been critiqued for its limited focus on developing followers' leadership skills (Avolio et al., 2009). A more holistic approach that combines transformational elements with other leadership styles may be necessary for fostering sustainable leadership capacity within an organization.

While holding significant promise for educational settings, transformational leadership necessitates a critical and balanced approach. Recognising its strengths and potential weaknesses allows a more nuanced understanding of its application. School leaders who integrate transformational elements with other leadership styles while upholding ethical principles are likely to navigate the complexities of the educational landscape more effectively, fostering a motivated and empowered school community.

Instructional Leadership:

The role of the principal extends to the domain of instructional leadership—an approach that focuses on creating a robust educational programme by fostering effective teaching and learning practices (Hallinger, 2011). While widely embraced, the concept of instructional leadership necessitates a critical examination to ensure its effective implementation in diverse educational settings.

Foundational research by Hallinger (2011) offers comprehensive insights into instructional leadership. Still, closer scrutiny of the methodological rigour of included studies and an expansion to encompass non-Western educational contexts could enhance its applicability. Similarly, Alhashem and Alhouthi's (2021) context-specific study on Kuwait provides valuable insights into the challenges and complexities of educational reform in that region. However, a more transparent methodological description and a discussion of its limitations in terms of generalizability would strengthen its contribution to the broader field.

These examples underscore a common challenge in instructional leadership research: balancing the depth of context-specific studies with the broader applicability of findings. A critical analysis of such studies emphasises the need for school leaders to critically evaluate research findings and adopt a context-sensitive approach when implementing instructional leadership strategies. While the core tenets of instructional leadership, such as curriculum planning, assessment, and professional

development, remain crucial (Hallinger, 2011), their application must be tailored to each school community's unique cultural and social dynamics (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the field of instructional leadership would benefit from ongoing research that critically examines the efficacy of various strategies, the role of cultural context in shaping leadership practices, and the potential impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008). By fostering a more nuanced understanding of instructional leadership, educational leaders can ensure that their practices are evidence-based, contextually relevant, and conducive to student success. In my view, it's also crucial for future research to explore the interplay between instructional leadership and other leadership styles, recognizing that effective school leadership likely involves a blend of approaches tailored to the school's and its community's specific needs.

Distributed Leadership:

Shifting the focus from individual to collective leadership, distributed leadership embraces the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities across various school community members. This perspective, supported by Spillane (2006), exposes the fallacy of the “hero” headteacher narrative, illustrating how a shared leadership model can produce a more holistic and participatory approach to directing a school's direction.

When applied within a scholastic setting, distributed leadership suggests a paradigm in which teachers are empowered to take on leadership positions, intersecting with the principal's vision and creating a synergistic effect that can facilitate school improvement initiatives (Harris, 2014). However, implementing distributed leadership can be challenging, as it requires clear communication, shared responsibility, and a culture of trust among school community members. Research suggests that the successful implementation of distributed leadership can improve teacher morale, increase student achievement, and a greater sense of ownership among stakeholders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Synthesizing the leadership theories identified above as related to the Hawalli Educational District in Kuwait reveals a multifaceted understanding of how principals can influence their schools. In the context of the Hawalli Educational District, a blend of leadership approaches may be most effective. Transformational leadership can inspire and motivate, while instructional leadership ensures a focus on teaching and learning. Distributed leadership can empower teachers and foster collaboration, but it's crucial to address potential challenges and ensure clear communication and shared responsibility. A successful principal in this context might adopt a flexible leadership style, drawing on different approaches as needed to meet the specific needs of their school and community.

2.2.2 Leadership Theories in Kuwait

Educational leadership, particularly in secondary public school contexts, has become a primary subject of inquiry to improve institutional outcomes and student achievement (Day et al., 2010). This crucial topic is discussed within Kuwait's educational system, with the Hawalli Educational District being a notable case in point. This investigation delves into the distinctive leadership strategies that impact secondary public school principals in this district, focusing on their efficacy and cultural adaptability. This section synthesises relevant theories and contextual research to illustrate the unique dynamics of the Kuwaiti educational framework.

Among the various approaches, distributed leadership has garnered significant attention in contemporary educational discourse. Aldaihani (2020) examined the implementation of this model in Kuwaiti high schools and revealed insights pertinent to the decentralisation of leadership responsibilities. According to the study, teachers perceived distributed leadership as instrumental in fostering collaborative environments and enhancing the commitment of all stakeholders to school improvement. The effectiveness of shared leadership roles in Kuwait's educational settings implies that traditional hierarchical models may be less applicable in such a context. This collective approach seems to be suited to Kuwait's societal culture, which focuses on community and interpersonal relations.

Instructional leadership is consistent with distributed leadership, as stated by Alsaleh (2019). The author of this study summarised instructional leadership within the gamut of Kuwait's expansive educational reform initiatives, drawing upon school leaders' perspectives. The results highlighted a significant focus on developing curricula and pedagogical practices, acknowledging the principal's pivotal role in guiding teaching and learning processes. The study further suggested that modifications to the instructional leadership concept, such as increased sensitivity to cultural nuances and a more inclusive decision-making process, would enhance its relevance in Kuwaiti education.

Delving deeper into actual leadership practices within Kuwaiti schools, M. Alsharija and J.J. Watters (2021) analysed the multifaceted roles of secondary school principals in the context of transformative agendas. As agents of change, these

educational leaders are posited to confront challenges not confined to the administrative sphere but also nurture an environment conducive to progressive educational practices. This research is instructive in outlining the adaptive measures necessitated by socio-cultural factors existing in the Kuwaiti school system.

The School Excellence Model, as elucidated by Al-Daihani (2014), serves as a crucial framework for evaluating school performance in Kuwait. The model's emphasis on leadership strategies that align with national development goals underscores the interconnectedness between educational excellence and broader societal progress. It encourages leadership practices that foster academic achievement and contribute to Kuwait's social and economic advancement. However, recent research by Hammad et al. (2022) has revealed a scarcity of studies specifically investigating the leadership practices that drive school excellence within the Kuwaiti context. This research gap highlights the need to further explore the relationship between educational leadership strategies and school performance outcomes in Kuwait, particularly within the Hawalli Educational District. The present study addresses this gap by examining the specific leadership practices employed by secondary public school principals in the Hawalli Educational District and their impact on school performance.

The theories and research discussed thus far require alignment with Kuwait's entrenched cultural and educational paradigms. In reviewing such literature, school principals must consider the unique fabric of Kuwaiti society, which has deep-seated values and traditions. Within this connection, educational leadership strategies must be adapted or recalibrated. According to these sources, local leaders often struggle to bridge global educational concepts with local practices and expectations. Therefore, they are inclined to seek pathways that merge international standards with the Kuwaiti context.

Overall, this literature review highlights some of the educational leadership strategies that influence secondary public school principals within the Hawalli Educational District in Kuwait and their adaptations to suit the Kuwaiti context. The complex interplay between academic theories and cultural dimensions requires responsive and innovative leadership skills. Further inquiry into these leadership strategies should continue to inform their evolution within Kuwait's schools-shaped leaders who are not merely administrators but visionaries of educational progress.

2.3 Educational Leadership in Kuwait

Effective educational leadership, which focuses on instructional practices and school management, significantly influences student outcomes and shapes educational results worldwide (Robinson et al., 2008). This section reviews the works that study leadership strategies for secondary public school principals within the Hawalli Educational District of Kuwait. It examines regional trends and Kuwait's distinct educational climate and seeks to unveil the styles and strategic paradigms that create leaders in these settings by drawing on contemporary research and theoretical frameworks.

2.3.1 Kuwaiti and Middle East Educational Context:

While sharing commonalities with the broader Middle East, Kuwait's educational leadership environment exhibits unique characteristics reflective of its societal narratives and policy landscapes. An in-depth analysis of the existing literature on Kuwait's educational system reveals some factors that shape leadership paradigms.

AlKandari (2013) provides an insightful review of Kuwait's strategic education planning policy, indicating a period of intense improvement to enhance Kuwait's education sector. This study assumes that the effectiveness of these policies is intrinsically linked to the leadership competencies displayed by school principals and administrators, who are the main players in bridging policies with real classroom actions (AlKandari, 2013). As AlKandari indicated, perceived effectiveness hinges on leaders' ability to engage in strategic thinking and systemic planning to meet the nation's ambitious educational objectives.

Building on the premise of leadership as a catalyst for educational transformation, a series of studies highlight the multifaceted nature of effective leadership in Kuwait. Almonawer (2021) emphasises the transformative power of principals who embody inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. These leaders, Almonawer argues, have the potential to cultivate a progressive educational culture aligned with Kuwait's developmental aspirations.

Complementing this focus on transformational leadership, Alsaleh (2019) delves into the complexities of instructional leadership within the Kuwaiti context. His study underscores the critical role of instructional leaders who can navigate the interplay between reform policies and educational practices, effectively guiding teachers through pedagogical advancements. This research illuminates the direct impact instructional leadership has on classroom dynamics and student learning, positioning leaders as crucial agents in translating policy into practice.

Extending the lens beyond Kuwait, Harthi and Al-Mahdy (2017) examine the implementation of distributed leadership in Egypt and Oman. Their findings suggest that effective leadership is not solely the domain of principals but thrives when responsibilities are shared among various stakeholders. This decentralized approach fosters collaboration and enhances decision-making, ultimately improving school effectiveness. However, their study also acknowledges the challenges of cultural resistance to change and entrenched hierarchical structures.

Together, these studies paint a rich tapestry of regional educational leadership. They collectively emphasize the need for leaders who can inspire and empower others, navigate the complexities of policy implementation, and foster a collaborative environment that supports continuous improvement. While acknowledging the potential obstacles, these studies offer a hopeful vision for the transformative power of leadership in shaping the future of education in Kuwait and beyond.

Litz and Scott (2017), in their study on transformational leadership in the United Arab Emirates educational system, argued that leaders who inspire, motivate, and consider individual teachers' potential for growth build a supportive school culture. This leadership practice appeared to be connected with school improvement and student success in the UAE, which is culturally and educationally similar to Kuwait.

These sources report on Kuwaiti educational leadership that prioritises strategic foresight, transformational influence, and instructional expertise. However, it is noteworthy that these leadership attributes do not exist in isolation but are linked to the region's sociocultural-foundations and state-sponsored educational drives. Bridging the gap between global research findings and Kuwait's specific educational leadership studies could provide further insight into the distinctive characteristics of leadership strategies within the Hawalli Educational District.

2.3.2 Kuwait Educational District Policies

Like other nations, Kuwait has an education system shaped by specific laws and regulations designed to standardise educational practices (Alsaleh, 2022). The educational system in Kuwait was also explained in the previous chapter. These policies encompass various aspects, including curriculum frameworks, evaluation protocols, and resource allocation strategies. Curriculum policies are particularly influential as they dictate the content taught across the district, outlining the syllabus, learning outcomes, and educational objectives for each academic year (AlKandari, 2013). Evaluation policies determine how student performance is assessed, both formally through examinations and informally through continuous assessment (Eid & Koushki, 2005). Finally, resource allocation policies govern the distribution of financial, human, and material resources to schools, significantly impacting the quality of the learning environment (Alhashem & Alhouthi, 2021).

These policies profoundly impact the autonomy and decision-making processes at the school level, particularly for principals. The prescriptive nature of curriculum policies, for instance, can limit principals' ability to adapt educational content to the unique needs of their students and the local context (Burney et al., 2013). This may lead principals to adopt a more bureaucratic or managerial leadership style, focusing on ensuring compliance with established standards. Similarly, evaluation policies, particularly those emphasising standardised testing, can pressure principals to prioritise test results over holistic educational goals, potentially stifling creativity and innovation in teaching methods (Alsaleh, 2022). The availability and distribution of resources can also affect principals' leadership styles, with limited or inequitable resource allocation constraining their ability to implement new initiatives or address specific school needs.

In essence, while Kuwait's educational district policies provide a necessary framework for schools, they can significantly impact principals' autonomy, decision-making capabilities, and choice of leadership styles. Striking a balance between maintaining uniform standards and empowering school leaders to adapt to the specific needs of their schools remains a critical challenge. Further research into this complex dynamic is essential to inform policymaking and create more responsive and effective educational environments.

2.4 Diversity and Educational Leadership

Diversity emerges as an indispensable way to effective schooling in tackling the strict policies of educational institutions in the modern era (Santamaría, L. and Santamaría, A.P., 2016). This section sheds light on diversity within the educational sphere, exploring the benefits while focusing on leadership strategies and heterogeneous learning environments by reviewing the related research works.

2.4.1. The Importance of Diversity

The evolving demographic landscape of educational institutions requires a deeper understanding of diversity's role within the school. The presence of diversity within both the teaching workforce and student body, as unanimously acknowledged by academic research, is paramount to the composite of a forward-looking education system (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). The introduction of myriad cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives serves a dual purpose: to enrich the learning environment while reflecting on societal plurality (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). By integrating diversity, schools function as microcosms of society where students learn to navigate and appreciate the natural world's multiple dimensions (Ryan, 2006).

Teachers from diverse backgrounds bring a broad set of pedagogies, which helps to broaden student perspectives. This might also lead to higher academic performance, especially for minority students who share the same culture as those teachers (Dee, 2005). In addition, effective leadership can harness diversity as a tool to enhance school performance. Leaders can create a culture of mutual respect and collective responsibility by combining various pedagogical approaches that promote teacher collaboration and innovation (Leo & Barton, 2006). Moreover, good leaders can prepare comprehensive policies that address and encompass everyone's educational needs, fostering an effective and culturally inclusive environment (Ryan, 2006).

2.4.2 Leadership Strategies for Different Schools

Research works argue that culturally responsive leadership is a transformative practice in which leaders consider their school community's cultural references and proactively integrate this knowledge into curricular and extracurricular activities (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). Such leaders effectively address institutional biases and empower staff to adopt pedagogies that meet students' diverse cultural identities.

The literature also discusses the efficacy of inclusive practices within schools (Leo & Barton, 2006). To manage diverse teams effectively, the authors suggest strategies that acknowledge individuality, ensure equity in opportunity, and incite cross-cultural dialogue (Santamaría, L. and Santamaría, A.P., 2016).

The study conducted by Al-Kandari explores the relationship between culturally focused leadership strategies and the improvement of educational quality in diverse settings, specifically in Kuwaiti schools with a multinational workforce. The findings of this research have broader implications for leadership in diverse educational settings (AlKandari, 2013). By examining the effects of strategic education planning and policies, Al-Kandari found that culturally focused leadership can overcome the complexities introduced by diverse workforces, which improves education quality. Her work represents the relationship between leadership strategies and their capacity to adapt and thrive in an environment that mirrors each school's society.

A diverse and inclusive school environment must align with the globalised society. The reviewed literature shows the benefits of diversity and calls for skilled, transformational leadership that supports cultural responsiveness and inclusion. Such initiatives pave the way for developing students to engage in the diversifying conversations of the contemporary world.

2.5 The relationship between educational leadership and school improvement

Principals, as educational leaders, play a crucial role in school development by adopting strategies that improve teachers' performance. In the context of Hawalli Educational District in Kuwait, it is essential to identify which leadership strategies

impact secondary public-school principals and the reasons for their efficacy. This literature review explores the relationship between educational leadership and school improvement.

2.5.1 Measuring School Performance:

Measuring school performance requires the consideration of multifaceted indicators to capture its complexities accurately. Such indicators include student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and parental involvement (Leithwood et al., 2008). Student achievement is often measured through standardised test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment statistics, which are tangible quantifiers of a school's effectiveness (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). Teacher satisfaction relates to how educators find their professional lives rewarding, which impacts their performance and directly affects student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008). Parental involvement encompasses various forms of participation in school life and has been linked to improved student behaviour and academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

2.5.2 Impact of Leadership on School Improvement:

Scholars have examined the correlation between leadership practices and school outcomes. A meta-analysis by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) revealed that schools with high-quality leadership are more likely to exhibit enhanced student outcomes than schools with less proficient leadership. This confirms the assumption that effective leadership is central to improving schools (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) demonstrate that setting clear visions for staff and students often leads to remarkable improvements in schools' performance. Additionally, Day et al. (2016) highlight the importance of fostering a collaborative school culture in which teachers are involved in decision-making processes, which promotes their commitment and performance.

Furthermore, instructional leadership, in which principals actively engage with curriculum and teaching methods, has a significant effect on academic outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In the same vein, distributing leadership responsibilities enables a more profound integration of innovative practices and shared accountability, which, in turn, contributes to school improvement (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

In a study specific to the Middle Eastern context, Khasawneh et al. (2012) found that leadership strategies focusing on continuous improvement and the development of human resources were effective in achieving success in Jordanian schools, suggesting a potential influence on neighbouring countries like Kuwait.

2.6 Summary

Educational Leadership and School Improvement.

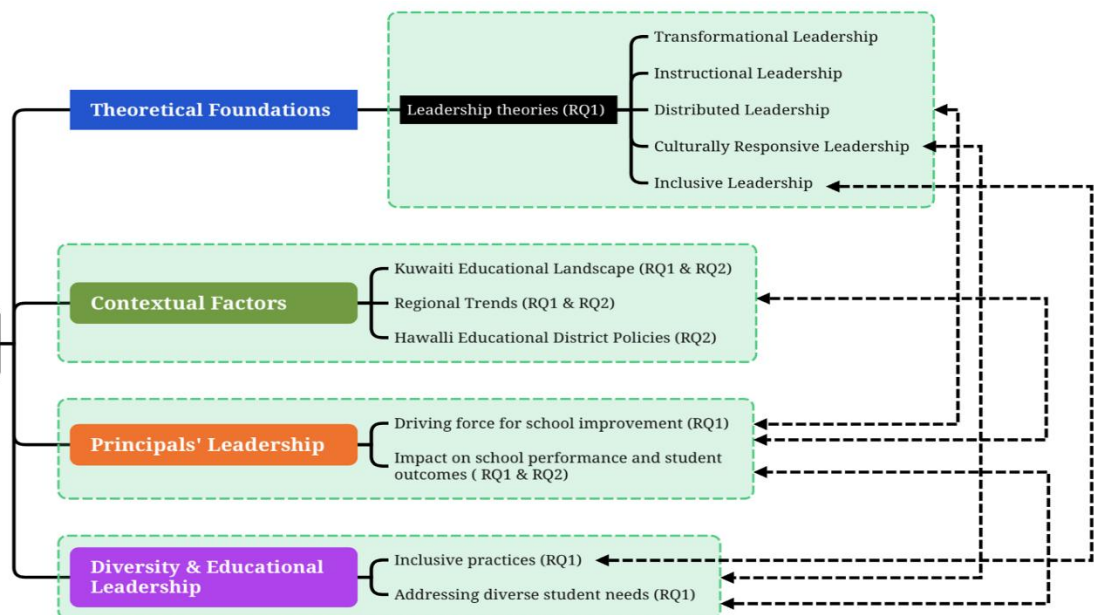


Fig 1. Educational Leadership and School Improvement.

The conceptual model illustrates the dynamic interplay of factors influencing educational leadership and school improvement in the Hawalli Educational District of Kuwait. The model posits that effective leadership practices are grounded in theoretical foundations, providing the framework for understanding and implementing successful strategies. However, these theoretical underpinnings must be adapted to the unique contextual factors in the Kuwaiti educational landscape, including regional trends and specific policies. The model emphasises the pivotal role of principals in driving school improvement through their leadership, highlighting the impact they can have on school performance and student outcomes. Finally, the model underscores the importance of diversity and educational leadership, recognizing the need for inclusive practices that cater to the diverse needs of students within the district. The interconnectedness of these elements suggests that successful school improvement efforts require a nuanced understanding of leadership theories, contextual factors, and the specific needs of the school community.

Relating this model to the proposed research questions, we can see a precise alignment:

1. "What do school principals in the Hawalli District consider the most effective educational leadership strategies for school development? and what are the reasons behind these beliefs? (RQ1) " This question directly connects to the interplay between theoretical foundations and the impact of leadership on school improvement. It seeks to understand how principals perceive the effectiveness of different leadership strategies and the rationale behind their choices, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice.
2. "How do the policies and directives established by the Hawalli Educational District influence the principals' leadership practices? (RQ2) " This question explores the relationship between contextual factors and the impact of leadership. It investigates how the specific policies and directives of the Hawalli Educational District shape the leadership practices of principals, highlighting the influence of the local context on leadership enactment.

These research questions are crucial because they address the core components of the conceptual model and their interrelationships. By exploring these questions, the research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to effective educational leadership and school improvement in the specific context of Kuwait's Hawalli Educational District. This knowledge can inform the development of targeted interventions and professional development programs that support principals in enhancing school outcomes and creating a positive learning environment for all students.

The next chapter will outline the research methodology and explain the choice of qualitative methods to capture the intricacies of educational leadership in Hawalli. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the strategies that drive secondary education in this vibrant district of Kuwait.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to investigate educational leadership strategies that influence secondary public school principals in Kuwait's Hawalli Educational District. This section details the research philosophy, design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques, emphasising the study's commitment to ethical standards.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Design

The dissertation's exploration of leadership strategies and their impact on education is grounded in an interpretive and social constructivist research philosophy. The interpretive paradigm posits that reality is not a singular, objective truth but a mosaic of subjective interpretations and socially constructed meanings (Creswell, 2016). In the context of educational leadership within the Hawalli Educational District, this implies that leadership practices and their effectiveness are not universally defined but are shaped by the district's unique social, cultural, and historical context. The social constructivist perspective further emphasises that leadership is not merely an individual attribute but a phenomenon that emerges from the interactions and shared understandings within the school community (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). The over-reliance on quantitative methods and the lack of methodological diversity in the existing literature on educational leadership and management in the Arabian Gulf region, as highlighted by Hammad et al. (2022), further support adopting a qualitative approach in this study. Qualitative data collection and analysis techniques will enable a deeper exploration of the unique contextual factors shaping educational leadership practices within the Hawalli region.

This philosophical stance has significant implications for interpreting and applying the leadership theories and literature discussed in Chapter 2. Rather than presenting a definitive account of leadership, the literature review is seen as a collection of diverse perspectives and interpretations, each influenced by the context in which it was generated. The theories, such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership, are not viewed as prescriptive models but as frameworks for understanding leadership's complex and dynamic nature within the Hawalli district. The emphasis on the social construction of leadership aligns particularly well with theories like distributed leadership, which highlight the importance of shared responsibility and collective action in achieving school improvement (Spillane, 2006).

The rejection of positivism and the embrace of knowledge as relative and context-dependent also inform the methodological choices for this study. The selection of qualitative methods, designed to capture participants' lived experiences and subjective interpretations, reflects the belief that understanding educational leadership in Hawalli requires delving into the specific meanings and understandings that shape leadership practices within this unique context. The qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how leadership is perceived, enacted, and experienced by stakeholders in Hawalli schools, thus contributing to a richer and more contextually relevant understanding of educational leadership.

3.3 Qualitative Research Approach

Consistent with the research philosophy outlined above, the qualitative research approach is employed in this research. This approach encompassed semi-structured interviews with the schools' principals. The utilisation of interviews with principals (n=9) in this study holds promise in generating a nuanced and in-depth understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The semi-structured format allows for exploring varied aspects of principals' leadership while providing space for them to share unique insights, fostering a richer comprehension of the leadership landscape in the Hawalli Educational District (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

This qualitative approach is well-suited to capturing the complexities and contextual nuances often missed by quantitative methods. However, it is crucial to acknowledge potential limitations. The small sample size may constrain the generalisability of findings, and inherent subjectivity in qualitative data collection and analysis necessitates careful reflexivity and member checking to enhance validity (Patton, 1999). While demanding in terms of time and resources, the potential for rich, contextually grounded insights into educational leadership practices in the Hawalli District justifies the investment.

3.4 Sampling

As an external researcher, I approached this study as an outsider to the specific context of secondary public schools in the Governorate. Recognising this positionality, I employed a convenience sampling approach (Cohen et al., 2018) to recruit participants. Given the total population of 20 secondary public schools in the Governorate (CSB, 2021), I directly contacted all 20 principals via email. The message outlined the research purpose, emphasised confidentiality assurances, and specified the anticipated time commitment for an interview. While this approach facilitated direct communication, it also encountered challenges. Six principals declined participation, citing scheduling conflicts and other obligations and highlighting the demanding nature of their roles. Additionally, five principals remained inaccessible due to outdated or incomplete contact information, underscoring the dynamic nature of school leadership. I acknowledge the inconvenience this may have caused and appreciate their time and consideration.

Despite these challenges, nine principals graciously consented to participate, demonstrating their commitment to educational research and improvement. This sample size proved sufficient to achieve data saturation (Guest et al., 2006), where subsequent interviews ceased to yield new insights, ensuring the research objectives were met. The final sample included male and female secondary school principals, reflecting the gender-segregated nature of Kuwait's education system (CSB, 2021).

However, due to the small size of the Hawalli district and the limited number of principals, providing additional demographic details could compromise the anonymity of the participants. The study refrains from disclosing further specific information about the principals to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality.

3.5 Data Collection:

In this research, I used semi-structured interviews as the main data collection mechanism to explore the multifaceted dimensions of educational leadership within the selected secondary schools. Specifically, these interviews were designed to elicit insights from the school leaders and discuss subjects such as the leadership practices they adopted, the obstacles they encountered in their pedagogical and administrative duties, the influence of educational policies, and the self-perceived efficacy of their leadership methodologies.

Before conducting the interviews, a pilot test was undertaken with three managers who were not a part of the main study but carried comparable positions within similar educational institutions. This pilot study served two purposes: checking the clarity of the interview questions and confirming their relevance to the research questions (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). Feedback from this test helped in refining some questions to enhance their clarity, thus increasing the potential for eliciting rich responses in the main study (Cassell and Symon, 1994). The suggested interview questions are presented in Appendix 1.

All interviews will be audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The interview study was approved by the local ethics committee of the University of Southampton, with the registration confirmation reference number 93727. Participants consented to the interview and audio and video recording. All personally identifiable information was anonymised. The subsequent analysis of these transcriptions converted the data into themes and patterns that corresponded to the research objectives.

3.6 Thematic Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis (TDA) is a qualitative research strategy that can extract meaning from narrative data. This section will explain the rationale, process, and anticipated outcomes of employing thematic analysis in the study of educational leaders.

Thematic data analysis is distinguished by its flexibility and depth. It enables identifying, organising, and making sense of repeated patterns and themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis method is particularly adept at managing data from interviews, as it allows for an in-depth examination of the text to detect themes pertinent to the research question.

Thematic analysis allows interpretable data to emerge directly from participants' experiences without the constraints of pre-established theoretical frameworks (Nowell et al., 2017). By relying on an inductive approach, the research embraces openness and allows unexpected insights to emerge that are difficult for other prescriptive methodologies to uncover.

The thematic analysis process for this research is guided primarily by the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarisation with the Data: This involves diving into the data through active reading and rereading of interview transcripts. An initial list of ideas is generated during this phase.
2. Initial Coding: The data are systematically coded to categorise and generically identify text segments related to the study issues.
3. Theme Exploration: The codes will be organised to detect recurring patterns that serve as the foundation for future topics.
4. Evaluating Themes: Themes will undergo a thorough examination and adjustment process to ensure that they appropriately reflect the coded segments and entire dataset.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme is explicitly named, focusing on ensuring distinctiveness and coherence.
6. Producing the Report: The final analysis will involve selecting descriptive extracts that describe each theme and organising the findings through the lens of the existing research literature.

I will adopt an iterative approach throughout the process, continuously moving back and forth between the entire dataset, the coded extracts, and the developing themes. This cyclical process aligns with the principles of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and facilitates a flexible and reflexive analysis, as emphasized by Miles and Huberman (1994). The iterative nature of this approach allows for the continuous refinement and validation of emerging themes, ensuring a rich and accurate representation of the data. By constantly revisiting and interrogating the data, I will be able to identify nuanced patterns and relationships, enhancing the depth and trustworthiness of the findings. This approach is precious in this research, as it allows for exploring complex and potentially sensitive themes related to educational leadership in a culturally specific context. The iterative process will help to ensure that the analysis remains grounded in the data while also being informed by relevant theoretical frameworks.

3.7 Reliability and Validity of the Research

When conducting a reliable study, it is crucial to build a robust framework that ensures that the research is both trustworthy and accurate (Cohen et al., 2018). Several strategies, including member checking and reflexivity, were employed to apply both reliability and validity in this study.

Member checking is a critical strategy in which information and results are returned to the participants for confirmation and validation. This step is particularly significant because it allows participants to review the findings and, if necessary, change them or correct them. This aligns the interpretations with the participants' experiences, thus improving the study's credibility (Harper & Cole, 2012). Sharing findings with participants not only reinforces the validity of the data but also adds a sense of ownership and contribution to the study's outcomes (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Lastly, reflexivity, an integral component of this investigation, necessitates acknowledging the researchers' inherent biases and their potential influence on the findings (Malterud, 2001). By critically reflecting upon my assumptions, values, and actions throughout the research process, I actively sought to mitigate potential sources of bias and foster a deliberate self-awareness that underpins the integrity of the research. This ongoing reflexivity, characterized by a continual evaluation of the research process and its findings, ensured that the investigation remained an empirical endeavour grounded in evidence rather than a mere reconstruction of my subjective viewpoints.

3.8 Ethics and Risk Assessment Procedures

The study prioritised ethical conduct in research, establishing strict ethics and risk assessment procedures to save participants and maintain the integrity of the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's aims, nature of participation, and potential risks (BERA, 2018).

Mertler (2021) emphasised the importance of the confidentiality and anonymity of participant data, ensuring that details that may reveal participant identities were carefully managed or omitted. Specific ethical permissions were sought to engage with educational professionals in Kuwait, including clearance from the Ministry of Education and approval from the Hawalli Educational District.

The study complied with the ethical guidelines stipulated by the Educational Research Governance Organisation (ERGO), ensuring that the proposal accounts for all potential ethical concerns before the start of the study. Maintaining anonymity also contributed to the validity of the research by encouraging candidness and openness among participants, enabling them to articulate profound and authentic perspectives on educational leadership tactics at public secondary schools.

3.9 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has explained the details of the methodology in the current research. Utilising a qualitative approach, the study employed purposive sampling, refined semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to explore the complexities of educational leadership strategies in Hawalli secondary schools.

Throughout this investigation, several efforts have been made to guarantee the reliability and validity of the research findings through member checking and reflexivity. All participant data were extracted with prior informed consent, and considerable measures were implemented to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity, thus keeping the high standards of ethical practice.

Chapter 4: Finding

4.1 Overview of the chapter

This study investigated the extent and influence of educational leadership strategies in Hawalli secondary public schools in Kuwait. This study sought to identify and analyse the pivotal educational leadership strategies that principals employ,

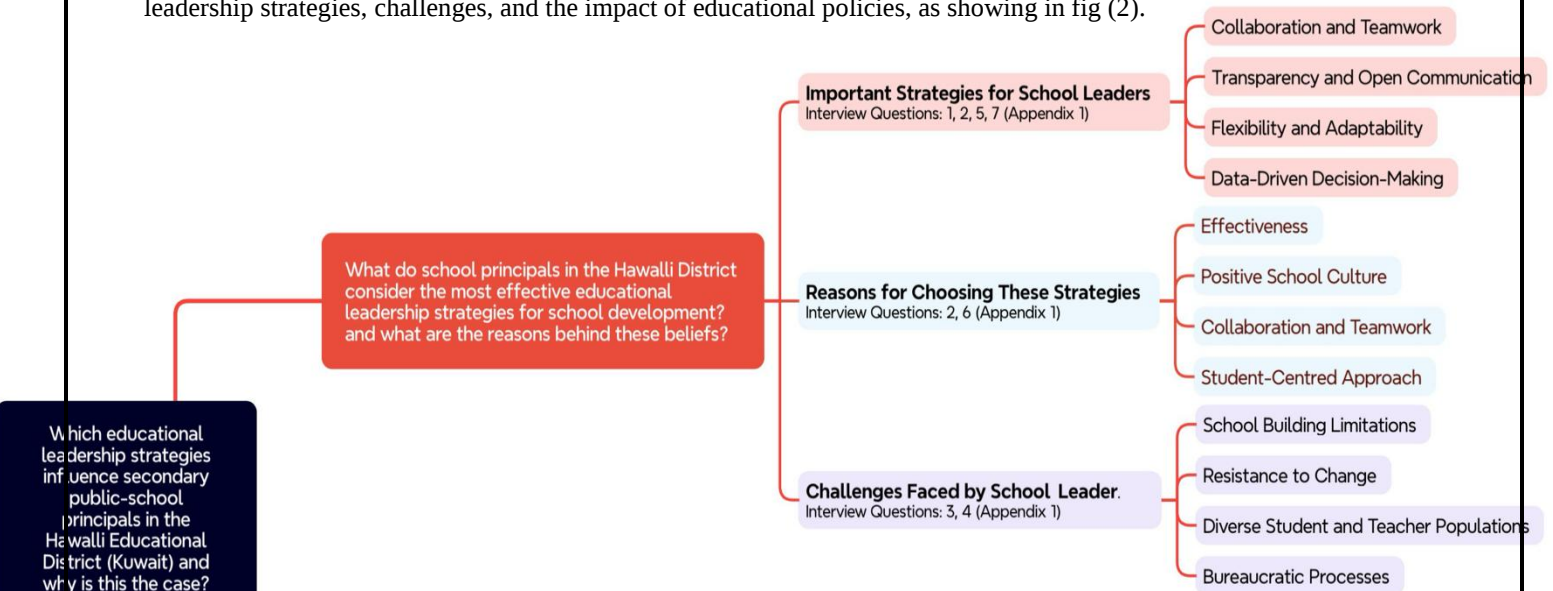
comprehend the factors influencing their implementation, and evaluate the implications of these strategies on enhancing school performance.

The two research questions that were addressed in this study were: “What do school principals in the Hawalli District consider the most effective educational leadership strategies for school development, and what are the reasons behind these beliefs?” and “How do policies and directives set by the Hawalli Educational District influence the principals' leadership practises?”. The study sample's diversity is briefly showcased in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of the study sample's diversity

Variables	Obs.	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Gender:					
male	9	56%	0.53	0	1
female	9	44%	0.53	0	1
Educational Level:					
bachelor	9	56%	0.53	0	1
master	9	11%	0.33	0	1
PhD	9	33%	0.50	0	1
Experience at Schools:					
Experience more than a school	9	44%	0.53	0	1
Experience in one school	9	56%	0.53	0	1
Years of Experience:					
One or fewer	9	22%	0.44	0	1
2 to 5	9	34%	0.53	0	1
6 to 10	9	22%	0.44	0	1
11 to 14	9	11%	0.33	0	1
15 and above	9	11%	0.33	0	1

The analysis of the interviews with the school principals revealed several key themes and subthemes related to their leadership strategies, challenges, and the impact of educational policies, as showing in fig (2).



Which educational leadership strategies influence secondary public-school principals in the Hawalli Educational District (Kuwait) and why is this the case?

Fig. 2. Data analysis.

4.2 Important Strategies for School Leaders
 Thematic analysis of the interview data identified several prominent tactics that principals believe are crucial for successful school leadership. According to the graphic, the four most significant strategies were for school administrators.

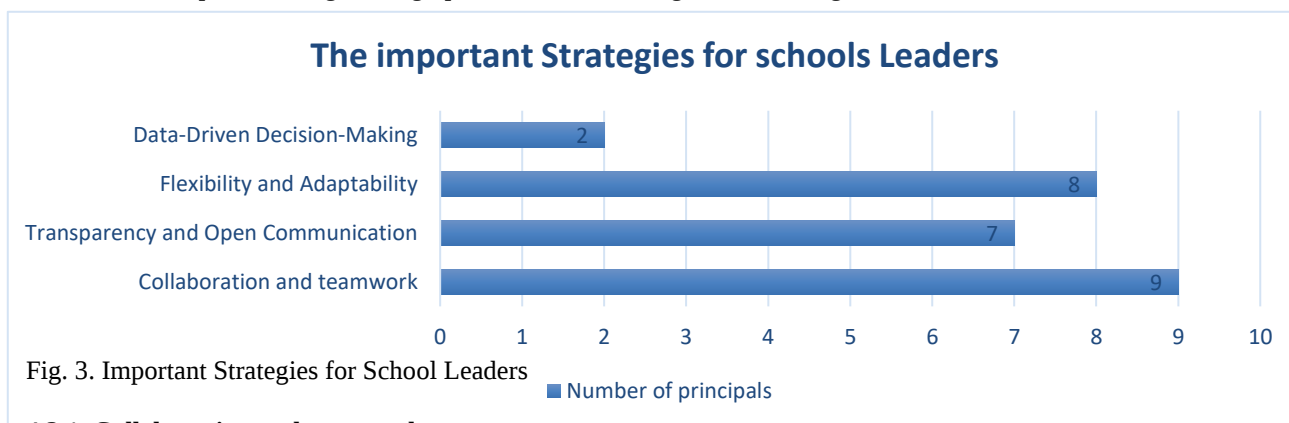


Fig. 3. Important Strategies for School Leaders

4.2.1. Collaboration and teamwork

All nine principals in this study emphasised the importance of collaboration and teamwork as foundational strategies for effective school leadership. They highlighted the value of shared decision-making involving teachers, staff, and even students. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among all stakeholders, leading to increased motivation and a more positive school culture. It is noteworthy that although everyone highlighted this concept, they varied in how they implemented it. Principal 1 emphasised teamwork and collaboration, seeking input from all stakeholders, and building a strong, supportive team.

"When we plan at the end of the year for the next year, we distribute questionnaires to teachers, parents, and students, and this makes us happy in making appropriate decisions in distributing appropriate committees and work teams for each teacher and choosing activities appropriate to the aspirations of our students." (P1).

Principal 7 also mentioned using democratic and collaborative leadership styles and actively involving everyone in the school community in decision-making.

"As I mentioned earlier, I strongly advocate democratic and diplomatic leadership. This means that I will actively seek input from teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members as we make decisions about the future of our school. I believe that everyone's perspective is valuable, and by collaborating, we can find creative and effective solutions to our challenges" (P7).

Furthermore, Principle 4 describes creating multiple teams within the school, each with a leader and members responsible for specific tasks.

"To ensure our school's success, we have adopted a team-based approach. We have several teams, each focusing on a key area. For instance, we have a team dedicated to enhancing our school building and environment, another focused on promoting educational values, and a third working towards community partnerships. We even have a specialised team that supports and guides students facing challenges"(P4).

4.2.2 Transparency and Open Communication

Open communication and transparency emerged as another critical theme in the interviews. Seven of the nine principals stressed the importance of maintaining open lines of communication with staff, students, and parents. This transparency helps build trust, manage expectations, and create a sense of shared responsibility for the success of schools. Principal 4 emphasised the significance of communication and an open-door policy, highlighting its critical role in fostering trust and respect among individuals.

"I made sure that my room was the first room when entering to manage the school, and my door was always open to everyone. My goal was to listen to the teacher and the learner, and this listening to each other and democracy created an atmosphere for me, an atmosphere of respect among everyone in the school."(P4).

In addition, principle 8 emphasised that transparency is the most crucial strategy for building trust and collaboration among staff members.

"I give transparency number one in strategies because I do not want to be a two-sided coin. I tell the teacher that your work is good, and he is shocked by your evaluation at the end of the year. Therefore, transparency and

credibility will be the lens through which I determine the advantages and disadvantages of any work and for any person in the school, whether a teacher, a department head, or a student."(P8).

Furthermore, Principal 5 used social media channels to engage with stakeholders and disseminate information about school events.

" I use the social networking sites Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp to communicate with my teachers, students, and parents. I also review school activities through them and create channels to strengthen students whom teachers prepare for them on Telegram."(P5)

4.2.3 Flexibility and Adaptability

Eight of nine principals recognised the need for flexibility and adaptability in leadership. They acknowledged that the educational landscape is constantly evolving, and leaders must be willing to adjust their strategies to meet the changing needs of their respective schools. This adaptability involves being open to feedback, willing to experiment with new approaches, and making adjustments when necessary. Moreover, principle 3 emphasised that flexibility is key to navigating the complexities of school leadership.

" In my point of view, flexibility gives everything behind it. If I were flexible with the person in front of me, that's it; they will give me everything." (P3).

However, principle 9 emphasised the importance of flexibility and adaptability in leadership strategies,

"Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach. You must adapt your strategies based on the unique circumstances and individuals you work with."(P9).

Furthermore, Principle 6 highlighted the significance of cultural flexibility in implementing new techniques and ideas in the Kuwaiti school setting. This entails comprehending and valuing indigenous customs and traditions and then incorporating new methodologies in a manner that deeply connects with the school community. A diwaniyah is a customary Kuwaiti venue for social interaction, often furnished with cosy seating, recreational activities (Al-Zamil, 2022).

" To make the school an attractive environment for teachers and students, I created a Diwaniyah corner in the school for students and teachers to rest, and I placed authentic Kuwaiti games in it to give them a Diwaniyah atmosphere"(P6).

4.2.4 Data-Driven Decision-Making

Although not as universally emphasised as the previous themes, the two principals specifically highlighted the importance of data-driven decision-making. They stressed the value of collecting and analysing data related to student performance, teacher effectiveness, and school climate to inform leadership decisions. This data-driven approach allows principals to identify areas for improvement, track progress, and make evidence-based decisions that improve student outcomes. Principal 1 discussed the School Performance Improvement Division, which—collects demographic data, assesses academic achievement, and reviews school activities, with the principal overseeing and using it for informed decision-making.

"I have a School Performance Improvement Division, which is under my supervision and whose members are assistant principals and heads of scientific departments,... At the end of the first semester, we analysed the performance rates and found that the students had a weakness in mathematics. This problem was discussed with the students' data and demographics to solve it. One solution is the follow-up of students by their teachers to identify students' weak points through a follow-up book. The other solution is to provide free evening reinforcement after school hours, taught by the most experienced teachers." (P1).

In addition, Principle 8 emphasised the need for

"Second, I must have a database. If I do not have a database, I will not be able to analyse and put my priorities based on this database." (P8).

She also mentioned the School Performance Improvement team

" I have the performance improvement team, which is part of the leadership team, which is a team that follows the principal of the school. This committee includes four committees and the performance improvement team. I have the planning and follow-up committees. I have an electronic support committee. I hold the Professional Performance Development Committee. And I have a commissioning committee and a commissioning committee. The education team. The education team is the one that gives me indicators of school performance. The performance of the teacher according to the material and the class." (P8).

Furthermore, this principal discussed utilising statistics to analyse the tests to pinpoint areas where students face difficulties and formulate targeted interventions. She said

"That is why I have the statistics to analyse the tests."In the evaluation test, the head of the department sends the data to the performance improvement team to analyse it in the logic area of performance. This logic area is red, green, and yellow."(P8).

4.3 Reasons for Choosing These Strategies

The analysis of the principals' interviews revealed a consistent emphasis on four key reasons for selecting specific leadership strategies: effectiveness, fostering a positive school culture, promoting collaboration and teamwork, and maintaining a student-centred approach. These were repeated seven times for each reason, underscoring their importance in the principals' decision-making processes. This highlights the principals' dedication to creating a positive and supportive school environment that prioritises student learning and development, empowers teachers and students, and fosters collaboration among all school community members. Their focus on the effectiveness of their chosen strategies further emphasised their commitment to achieving positive school outcomes.

4.3.1 Effectiveness

Throughout the interviews, principals emphasised the effectiveness of their chosen strategies in driving school success. For instance, principle 6 underscored the importance of decentralised management and teamwork, stating,

"For me, team strategy and management are very important...This means that work with a leader will not succeed unless there is a distribution of tasks." (P6).

Moreover, principle 1 emphasised the importance of planning and using SWOT analysis to assess the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. He stated,

"Planning is the most important strategy. We begin preparing for the next school year at the end of each school year, and I use SWOT analysis, which is effective in planning, which includes setting clear goals, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and dealing with opportunities and challenges, which is the basis for achieving success in school." (P1).

In addition, Principal 2 emphasised the importance of being present at the event site (Gemba) to gain first-hand insights and make informed decisions. She stated,

"Gemba's strategy is the magic key to my success" (P2).

4.3.2 Positive school culture

Principals throughout the interviews highlighted the importance of fostering a positive school culture to enhance trust and overall school performance. For example, principle 4, the principal emphasised the significance of creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected, stating,

"We want to create a positive atmosphere in our school where everyone feels a sense of belonging" (P4).

On the other hand, Director 5 emphasised creating an attractive environment by providing integrated classes that contain everything the student needs, saying,

"We provide students with an attractive environment in the classroom where each student has his own tablet, and it contains a curriculum and the Internet inside the classroom so that it is easy to Students have access to information, and teachers also use electronic programs to create an atmosphere of challenge in the classroom" (P5).

4.3.3. Collaboration and Teamwork

Most principals highlighted the importance of collaboration and teamwork in their leadership strategies. For instance, in principle 7., the principal emphasised the importance of cooperation and respect among colleagues, stating,

"Leadership is based on the spirit of cooperation with colleagues in school...the assistant principals are my right hand...the department heads...are the means to achieve success in any school." (P7).

Furthermore, principle 8 discussed the significance of collaboration and integration in teamwork, stating,

"Spreading a culture of collaborative, integrative hope, I say there is always a difference between cooperation and integration... We must focus on the value we foster in the devotions of work" (P8).

Moreover, principle 3 emphasised teamwork as one of their core leadership strategies, stating,

"Teamwork is essential for creating a positive and productive school environment. When we work together, we can achieve more than we ever could alone" (P3).

4.3.4 Student-Centred Approach

In the interviews, principals consistently emphasised a student-centred approach in their leadership strategies. For example, Principal 4 reviewed The "Challenge Project," an educational initiative supporting struggling students by assigning teachers as fathers to provide mentorship and resources. It also involves collaboration with social and psychological services to address diverse needs.

He stated, "We gathered all the students who returned last year and those who had completed a year twice with served social and psychological services..... We saw what problems the students had. We discovered that among the problems we are talking about were social problems, the death of the father, separation..... We met with the students to find out which teacher they feel is a father to them. Then, we met with the teachers chosen to support the students,

supervised by psychological and social services. The success of this project is evident, as 17 out of 29 students on the verge of academic failure successfully passed their classes."(P4).

Principal 2 also highlighted the importance of adapting teaching strategies to meet students' evolving needs, particularly in response to technological advancements. They stated,

"The need to adapt teaching strategies to the changing needs of students, despite technological advances. The Ministry of Education provides us with smart boards, which have been used effectively in the classroom."(P2).

Principal 5 explained that they implemented a flipped classroom model, called the knockout class method, to engage students and improve learning outcomes. In this model, students prepare lessons and present them to the class. The principal explained,

"The method depends on the student being the basic pillar of the educational system, meaning the student is the one who prepares the lessons, researches, explains, and discusses. The knockout student method means that instead of the teacher being the basis of the teaching method, the student is (P5).

4.4 Challenges Faced by School Leaders

School leaders in the Hawalli Educational District face different challenges. These challenges can be classified into four subtopics, as shown in Fig. 4.

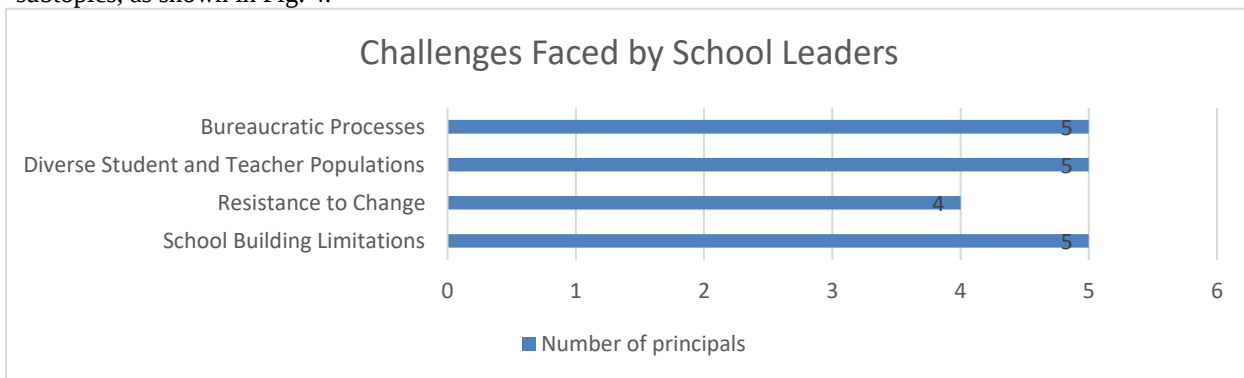


Fig. 4. Challenges Faced by School Leaders

4.4.1 School Building Limitations

Five principals mentioned the limitations of their school buildings as a significant challenge. These limitations include overcrowding, insufficient classroom space, and outdated infrastructure. One principal described the school building as old and highlighted difficulties in creating a positive learning environment under such conditions. For example, principle 6 acknowledged,

"The school building is a major challenge. We strategise and plan, but the building itself limits what we can achieve." (P6).

In addition, he mentioned, " Our school building is old and needs regular maintenance, and the school's annual allocations are not sufficient for maintenance and covering the needs of the scientific departments" (P6).

Principal 2 also stated that the primary obstacle lies in the limited dimensions of the educational facility.

"The school building was small, and we could not accommodate the growing number of students" (P2).

4.4.2 Resistance to Change

The three principals identified resistance to change as a significant obstacle. Resistance can come from teachers, staff, and even students who are accustomed to traditional methods and reluctant to embrace new ideas and initiatives. For example, principle 8 highlighted the challenge of changing the mindset of teachers who were previously employed to a more traditional, top-down leadership style.

"The biggest challenge was when I moved to this school and started from scratch, even though it had been a school that had been in existence since 1984. But the school was essentially just a building. I could not find any data or previous plans to build on it. Teachers are accustomed to traditional work and do not want to change due to the absence of professional principles. The culture of professional ethics. There is no training process for teachers" (P8).

Principal 4 also mentioned that the most significant obstacle was altering students' attitudes and behaviours, particularly about absences before vacation.

"The biggest problem I have is student absence, and I was thinking of solutions to reduce the percentage of student absence, especially before the vacation, so the first thing I did was implement the absence list and conduct motivational activities for the students to change their view of the school environment." (P4).

4.4.3 Diverse Student and Teacher Populations

The four principals interviewed generally had a positive view of the cultural diversity in their schools. They saw it as an asset that enriched the learning environment and prepared students for a globalised world. For example, Principal 6 described cultural diversity as "a beautiful thing" and emphasised that students are naturally exposed to and learn from diverse cultures in an era of globalisation and social media.

"The diverse backgrounds are beautiful for our students and teachers and a wellspring of creativity and innovation. They bring unique perspectives and experiences to our school, enriching our learning environment and preparing students to thrive in a globalised world." (P6).

On the other hand, Principal 9 admitted that school conditions greatly influenced the implementation of leadership strategies:

"The demographics of the students... 100% influenced my leadership approach. The way I dealt with the girls was different." (P9).

She explained that most of her students were non-Kuwaitis, which required her to adapt her communication style and consider cultural backgrounds:

"There was a difference... many female students were expatriates. This created a spirit of academic competition among students to obtain high grades." (P9).

4.4.4 Bureaucratic Processes

Principals expressed frustration with bureaucratic processes and the lack of autonomy in decision-making. Principal 2, when discussing the process of getting rid of old furniture, stated,

"I wanted to get rid of the old furniture in the school so that I could find enough space in the classrooms and teachers' rooms, but getting rid of the furniture requires approval from the ministry and correspondence. I called the responsible engineer to expedite this matter and move the furniture at my expense." (P2).

Principal 8 shared a similar experience:

"The endless paperwork and approvals required for even minor decisions are incredibly frustrating. It feels like our hands are tied, and we cannot do what is best for our school." (P8).

In addition, she shared an example of how bureaucratic processes can stifle innovation and initiative, stating,

"I wanted to install additional security cameras, but the approvals from the educational district and the ministry made it a long and complicated process between books and approvals that took a long time." (P8).

4.5 Impact of Hawalli Educational District Policies

Regarding the impact of Hawalli Educational District policies, three principals found them supportive, six found them restrictive and bureaucratic, and one had a different view. The principals suggested several policy changes to enhance their leadership roles, with six advocating for increased autonomy, three proposing streamlined processes, three recommending enhanced communication, and three suggesting more targeted training and support.

4.5.1 Various Views

The analysis of these interviews revealed a range of perspectives on the policies and support provided by the Hawalli Educational District. Some principals express appreciation for the district's guidance and resources. For instance, Principal 1 finds the policies supportive and enabling, stating:

"Of course, I have great freedom to act and make decisions. The space is open. But, of course, without exceeding the standards and the systems of the Hawalli Educational District." (P1).

Similarly, Principal 7 viewed the district's policies as supportive and conducive to effective leadership, citing their flexibility and willingness to cooperate with school principals.

"Honestly, in my experience, I have found nothing but flexibility and cooperation from the region." (P7)

However, the six principals raise concerns about the restrictive nature of specific policies and bureaucratic processes. For example, Principal 8 views the district's policies as a significant challenge to her leadership abilities, believing that they stifle innovation and limit autonomy.

"The policies of the Hawalli Education District often stifle innovation, limit autonomy, and create unnecessary bureaucracy." (P8).

Principal 9 expressed frustration with the district's lack of support and guidance, citing a lack of leadership due to vacant positions. Saying,

"Three people lead the school district because of the lack of filling vacancies, and this has a significant impact on the schools." (P9).

On the other hand, Principal 2 expressed her dissent against the stringent cheating laws implemented by the Ministry of Education, asserting that they were not conducive to the well-being of students. Conversely, the principal alleges that the school district's policies are conducive. Law and regulations protect everybody, saying,

"The educational district's policy and regulations support us as school principals because the system is capable of system realisation.....a proposal to change the cheating list that was put in place recently because if a student cheats in one subject, he is considered to have failed the entire semester in all subjects and is not allowed to take the rest of the tests, the punishment is stringent" (P2).

4.5.2 Limited Autonomy

Many principals feel that district policies and regulations limit their autonomy. They expressed frustration with bureaucratic processes and the lack of decision-making power in budgeting, staffing, and curriculum development. One principal states,

"The powers of the school principal are limited due to centralisation. I cannot do anything or make any decision without consulting the educational district" (P8).

Another principal mentioned the difficulty of obtaining approvals for activities and initiatives, stating,

"Bureaucracy exists, but it must be dealt with intelligently by convincing officials in the region of my project in a sophisticated manner and winning them over. However, I demand decentralisation." (P5).

Principals also feel constrained by the centralised nature of the Kuwaiti educational system. Decisions are often made at the ministry level and are then passed down to the educational zones and schools. This can limit principals' ability to respond to the specific needs of their schools and communities. Principal 4 noted,

"The Parents Council is an old idea, and I wanted to develop it by taking advantage of the former students at this school. They now hold high positions in the state, some of whom have become ministers and others are members of the People's Assembly. I am the leader of this school, from which I graduated. When our students see these success stories, they may be affected by them. Unfortunately, it was rejected by the educational district due to regulations" (P4).

4.5.3 Policy recommendations

Principals also offered several recommendations for policy changes, including increasing autonomy, streamlining processes, enhancing communication channels, and providing more targeted training and support.

Six principals advocated for increased autonomy in decision-making, emphasising the need for flexibility to address their school's unique challenges. For example, principle 3 stated,

"We need more autonomy to make decisions that best fit our school's unique circumstances and challenges. The current policies are too restrictive and limit our ability to be flexible and responsive." (P3).

Moreover, the three principals proposed streamlining bureaucratic processes, such as approvals for new programmes and teacher evaluations, to enable more efficient and timely action. For instance, principle 5 suggested

"Streamlining bureaucratic processes to facilitate timely action." (P5).

Furthermore, three principals recommended improving communication channels between the district and school leaders to foster collaboration and understanding. Principal 8 highlighted the need for more precise guidelines and regulations, stating,

"The ministry must set standards to measure school performance. The first principle is transparency." (P8).

Finally, the three principals suggested providing more targeted training and support for principals in decision-making, delegation, and conflict resolution. For example, Principle 9 recommended

"Providing more targeted training and support for principals in areas such as decision-making and delegation." (P9).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Overview of the Key Findings

This study investigated the educational leadership strategies employed by secondary school principals in Hawalli, Kuwait. Principals identified collaboration and teamwork, transparency and open communication, and flexibility and adaptability as crucial strategies for school improvement. Some principals also highlighted data-driven decision-making as a valuable tool. The principals' reasons for choosing these strategies were as follows:

- Their perceived effectiveness.
- Desire to foster a positive school culture.
- Belief in the power of collaboration.
- Commitment to a student-centred approach.

These reasons underscore the principles' dedication to creating a supportive, inclusive school environment, prioritising student learning and development.

However, the principals encountered various challenges, including limitations in school buildings and infrastructure, resistance to change and the need to adapt to cultural diversity. Bureaucratic processes and limited autonomy were also cited as hindrances. The impact of Hawalli Educational District policies was perceived differently by principals, with some finding them supportive and others restrictive, indicating a need for further investigation into the policy landscape and its effects.

5.2 Research Outcomes in the Framework of Existing Literature

5.2.1 What do school principals in the Hawalli District consider the most effective educational leadership strategies for school development? and what are the reasons behind these beliefs?

a. Important Strategies for School Leaders:

The existing literature supports the principals' emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, a cornerstone of distributed leadership. Leithwood et al. (2008) emphasised that successful school leadership involves building strong relationships and fostering collaboration among staff. The principals in this study echoed this sentiment, with Principal 1 using questionnaires and committees to gather input from various stakeholders and Principal 4 describing a team-based approach to school improvement. This collaborative approach not only aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of distributed leadership but also reflects the cultural context of Kuwait, which values community and interpersonal relationships (Aldaihani, 2020). This way, the study deepens our understanding of distributed leadership by highlighting the interplay between leadership practices, theoretical models, and cultural context.

The importance of transparency and open communication, a hallmark of transformational leadership, is also reflected in the findings. Burns (2012) emphasised that transformational leaders should foster open communication and build trust with their followers. This was evident in the practices of several principals in this study. Principal 4's open-door policy and active listening, Principal 8's emphasis on transparency for building trust, and Principal 5's use of social media for communication all exemplify the principals' commitment to open communication and transparency. This aligns with the literature on transformational leadership and its potential to enhance teacher motivation and student achievement (Day & Sammons, 2016).

The principals' recognition of the need for flexibility and adaptability is consistent with the literature on adaptive leadership, which emphasises the importance of leaders' ability to adjust their strategies to meet the changing needs of their schools (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). This was evident in the practices of several principals in this study. Principal 3's emphasis on flexibility as a key to navigating the complexities of school leadership, Principal 9's stress on adapting leadership strategies based on unique circumstances, and Principal 6's focus on cultural flexibility all demonstrate the principals' understanding of the importance of adaptability in educational leadership. This aligns with the literature on adaptive leadership and its potential to foster innovation and resilience in schools.

The emphasis on data-driven decision-making by some principals in this study is consistent with the literature on instructional leadership and highlights the importance of using data to inform decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Hallinger, 2011). This was evident in the practices of Principal 1, who used data from the School Performance Improvement Division to identify areas for improvement, and Principal 8, who emphasised the need for a database to analyse and prioritise school improvement efforts. This data-driven approach aligns with the literature on instructional leadership and its potential to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

b. Reasons for Choosing These Strategies

The principals' rationale for selecting specific leadership strategies aligns with the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence presented in the literature review. Their emphasis on the effectiveness of their chosen strategies resonates with the research on educational leadership's impact on school improvement. For instance, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) emphasised the importance of setting clear visions and expectations, a strategy echoed by Principal 1's focus on planning and SWOT analysis. The principals' recognition of the need for adaptability and flexibility aligns with the literature's emphasis on the dynamic nature of educational leadership and the need for leaders to adjust their strategies to meet the changing needs of schools.

Principals' desire to foster a positive school culture is consistent with research highlighting the importance of a school climate in influencing student achievement and teacher satisfaction (Day et al., 2016). This is evident in Principal 4's emphasis on creating an inclusive environment and Principal 5's efforts to create an attractive environment in the integrated classroom. The principals' belief in the power of collaboration and teamwork aligns with the concept of distributed leadership, which advocates for shared responsibility and decision-making (Spillane, 2006). This is reflected in Principal 7's emphasis on cooperation and respect among colleagues and Principal 8's focus on fostering a collaborative, integrative hope culture.

Principals' commitment to a student-centred approach is consistent with research emphasising the importance of student engagement and empowerment in educational leadership (Ryan, 2006). This is evident in Principal 4's focus on student well-being and academic success, Principal 2's emphasis on adapting teaching strategies to meet the evolving needs, and Principal 5's implementation of a flipped classroom model.

This study's findings confirm existing literature and offer new insights into the specific strategies and rationales employed by school principals in the Hawalli Educational District. For example, the principals' use of social media for communication (Principal 5) and the creation of a "Diwaniyah corner" to foster a culturally relevant and inviting school environment (Principal 6) are innovative strategies not extensively discussed in the existing literature. These examples highlight the

resourcefulness and adaptability of school leaders in the Hawalli Educational District as they tailor their approaches to the unique cultural contexts and needs of their community.

Furthermore, the principals' emphasis on effectiveness, positive school culture, collaboration, and student-centeredness reflects a deep understanding of the contributing factors to school success. Their experiences and perspectives provide valuable guidance for other educational leaders seeking to improve schools. For instance, the principals' emphasis on data-driven decision-making, although not universally emphasised, aligns with the growing recognition in the literature of the importance of using data to inform educational practices (Alsaleh, 2022). This suggests that school leaders in the Hawalli Educational District are aware of and actively incorporate emerging trends in educational leadership into their practices.

c. Challenges Faced by School Leaders

The challenges school principals face in relation to school building limitations align with the existing literature on the impact of resources on educational leadership. As highlighted by Alhashem and Alhouti (2021), resource allocation policies can significantly affect principals' autonomy and ability to lead and implement their vision effectively. This was mirrored in the experiences of Principal 6, who explicitly stated that the limitations of the school building hindered their ability to strategise and plan effectively. Similarly, Principal 2 noted difficulties in accommodating a growing student population within a limited space. These findings underscore the critical role of adequate resources and infrastructure in facilitating effective educational leadership.

Resistance to change encountered by the principals in this study is a common theme in the literature on educational leadership. Leithwood et al. (2008) identified resistance to change as a significant barrier to school improvement efforts. Resistance can stem from various sources, including teachers, staff, and students who may be accustomed to traditional methods and reluctant to embrace new ideas. In this study, Principal 8 highlighted the challenge of shifting the mindset of teachers accustomed to conventional leadership styles, while Principal 4 mentioned difficulties in changing student attitudes and behaviours. These findings emphasise the importance of effective change management strategies in educational leadership, particularly in contexts where traditional practices are deeply ingrained.

As the principals noted, the diverse student and teacher populations in the Hawalli Educational District reflected broader demographic trends in Kuwait. The literature on educational leadership in diverse contexts emphasises the importance of cultural competence and responsiveness. Al-Kandari (2013) examined the impact of a multinational workforce in Kuwaiti schools and found that culturally responsive leadership is crucial for navigating the complexities of diversity. In this study, Principal 6 embraced diversity in their school as a source of creativity and innovation, highlighting the positive aspects of diversity. However, Principal 9 noted that the diverse demographics of their students required them to adapt their communication style and consider cultural backgrounds, indicating the challenges that diversity can pose for educational leaders. These findings underscore the importance of cultural competence and responsiveness in educational leadership, particularly in diverse contexts like the Hawalli Educational District.

The frustration expressed by principals regarding bureaucratic processes and limited autonomy aligns with literature on the challenges of educational leadership in centralised systems. AlKandari (2013) noted that the rigid policies in Kuwait's educational system can limit principals' autonomy and decision-making power. This was echoed in the experiences of Principals 8 and 2, who both expressed frustration with bureaucratic processes and a lack of independence in decision-making. They provided specific examples of how these processes hindered their ability to implement changes and improvements in their schools. These findings highlight the need for policies that empower school leaders and provide them with the flexibility to respond to the unique needs of their schools.

5.2.2 How do the policies and directives established by the Hawalli Educational District influence the principals' leadership practices?

Impact of Hawalli Educational District Policies

The various views on the impact of Hawalli Educational District policies, as reported by the principals, reflect the complex relationship between district-level policies and school-level leadership practices. This aligns with AlKandari (2013), who highlighted the potential for conflict between adhering to district mandates and addressing individual schools' specific needs. This tension is evident in the various perspectives of the principals in this study.

Principal 1, who found the policies supportive and enabling, likely possesses a stronger sense of agency and is empowered to navigate the system effectively. This resonates with the literature on distributed leadership, in which empowered school leaders are more likely to perceive policies as guidelines rather than strict limitations (Aldaihani, 2020). Understanding the school system and its role could enable them to leverage the available resources and support to achieve their school goals. Conversely, Principal 8's perception of policies as a significant challenge, stifling innovation and limiting autonomy, suggests a lack of agency. This aligns with studies that found that rigid policies can result in a limited scope for principals to exhibit educational leadership (AlKandari, 2013). Their frustration and sense of powerlessness hindered their ability to implement their school vision.

Principal 2's nuanced perspective, criticising the Ministry of Education's strict cheating policy but praising the supportive nature of the district's policies, suggests a more complex understanding of agency. This reflects the literature's emphasis on the need for a sophisticated approach that acknowledges and values the historical and cultural context in which leadership development and practices are rooted (Kabasakal & Dastmalchian, 2001).

Principals' concerns about limited autonomy due to district policies and regulations align with literature on the challenges of educational leadership in centralised systems. AlKandari (2013) noted that the rigid policies in Kuwait's educational system can limit principals' autonomy and decision-making power. This is echoed in the experiences of several principals in this study, particularly Principal 8, who expressed frustration with the lack of decision-making power in budgeting, staffing, and curriculum development. This principal's sentiment that they "cannot do anything or make any decision without consulting the educational district" reflects the challenges highlighted in the literature regarding the constraints imposed by centralised decision-making processes.

Principal 5's experience of the difficulty of obtaining approval for activities and initiatives, despite his strategic navigation of bureaucratic processes, further exemplifies the tension between district-level policies and school-level autonomy. This aligns with Alsaleh (2019), who found that while instructional leaders are crucial in guiding teachers through curricular changes and pedagogical advancements, their effectiveness can be hindered by rigid policies and bureaucratic procedures.

Principal 4's experience with rejecting their proposal to involve former students on the Parents Council due to regulations also underscores the limitations imposed by district policies. This resonates with the findings of Alsharija and Watters (2021), who highlighted the challenges secondary school principals face in Kuwait as they strive to implement innovative practices amid a transformative agenda.

These findings emphasise the need for policies that accord school leaders more autonomy and flexibility in responding to their schools' and communities' unique needs. As the literature has suggested, a more decentralised approach to educational leadership can empower principals to make decisions that are more contextually relevant and responsive to the specific challenges faced by their schools. This could lead to increased innovation, improved teacher morale, and improved student outcomes.

The policy recommendations offered by the principals in this study align with the literature on effective educational leadership, emphasising the need to empower school leaders and provide them with the necessary resources and support (Leithwood et al., 2008). For instance, the principals' call for increased autonomy resonates with research findings that emphasise the positive impact of decentralised leadership on teacher collaboration and commitment to school improvement (Aldaihani, 2020).

The desire for streamlined processes and enhanced communication channels reflects the need for efficient and transparent systems that facilitate rather than hinder school improvement efforts (Alsaleh, 2019). Furthermore, the request for more targeted training and support aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of professional development for school leaders to enhance their skills and knowledge in decision-making, delegation, and conflict resolution (Hallinger, 2011).

The principal's recommendations also reflect the specific challenges they face in the Hawalli Educational District. For example, Principal 8's call for more precise guidelines and regulations could be interpreted as a desire for more explicit expectations and less ambiguity in policy implementation, aligning with the literature's emphasis on the importance of clear communication and shared understanding in educational leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008). Principal 9's request for more targeted training in decision-making and delegation could be seen as a response to the constraints imposed by the centralised nature of the Kuwaiti educational system, as highlighted in previous research (AlKandari, 2013).

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that providing principals with professional development opportunities focusing on understanding and navigating the policy landscape could benefit them. This could help school leaders identify the levers and powers available within the existing policy environment and empower them to advocate for change when necessary. Principals could become more effective change agents in their schools and communities by fostering more profound understanding of the policy context and developing advocacy skills.

5.3 Limitations of the Research

This research has certain limitations that require recognition. Initially, the study was limited by the data collection date, which coincided with the conclusion of the school year and the national test season in Kuwait. The scheduling issue impeded my ability to interview a broader spectrum of participants, such as teachers and district administrators. The restriction may have been influenced by the constrained period and the participants' opinions of the researcher as a student rather than an independent researcher.

Additionally, while providing valuable insights, the small sample size of the nine principals may not accurately reflect the different viewpoints and experiences of all the secondary public school leaders in the Hawalli Educational District. In addition, this study only examined principals' views, disregarding the opinions of other stakeholders such as teachers,

students, and parents. Including these perspectives might have offered a more thorough understanding of the educational leadership situation in the district.

5.4 Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study illuminate several avenues for future research on educational leadership in the Kuwaiti context. First, while this study focused on principals' perspectives, future research could delve into the views of other stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents. This approach would offer a more holistic understanding of the educational leadership landscape in Kuwait, revealing how different stakeholders perceive and experience leadership practice.

Second, while providing rich and nuanced data, the study's qualitative approach could be complemented by quantitative research to examine the statistical relationships between specific leadership strategies and school performance indicators. This would allow for a more rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of different leadership approaches and their impact on student achievement and other outcomes.

Third, the study's findings regarding the impact of Hawalli Educational District policies on principals' leadership practices suggest a need for further research on the policy landscape in Kuwait. This could involve examining the development and implementation of educational policies, their alignment with international best practices, and their impact on school-level decision-making and autonomy.

Finally, the study's identification of specific challenges principals face, such as school-building limitations, resistance to change, and bureaucratic processes, suggests research on strategies to address these challenges. This could involve exploring innovative approaches to school design, change management strategies, and policy reforms to empower and enhance school leaders' effectiveness.

By addressing these research gaps, future studies can contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of educational leadership in Kuwait, ultimately informing policy and practice to improve the country's education quality.

5.5 Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be made to enhance educational leadership in the Hawalli Educational District. First and foremost, fostering a culture of collaboration and teamwork is crucial. This involves encouraging shared decision-making and actively involving teachers, staff, and students in the decision-making process, aligning with the distributed leadership model advocated by Spillane (2006). Open lines of communication with all stakeholders should be maintained, and regular updates on school initiatives and progress should be provided, echoing the principles of transparency and open communication emphasised in transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Furthermore, school leaders should embrace flexibility and adaptability, be open to feedback, be willing to experiment with new approaches and make necessary adjustments. This aligns with the literature on adaptive leadership, which emphasises the importance of adjusting strategies to meet the evolving needs of schools (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). The utilisation of data-driven decision-making is also recommended, involving collecting and analysing data related to student performance, teacher effectiveness, and school climate to inform leadership decisions, as supported by research on instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2011).

At the policy level, advocating for increased autonomy for school leaders, particularly in budgeting, staffing, and curriculum development, is crucial. Streamlining bureaucratic processes, such as approvals for new programmes and initiatives, can enable more efficient and timely action. Enhancing communication channels between the district and school leaders can foster collaboration and understanding and address principal concerns regarding a lack of communication and support. Finally, providing targeted training and support for principals in decision-making, delegation, and conflict resolution enhances their leadership capabilities and effectiveness.

5.6 Conclusions

This section provides a comprehensive summary of the research conducted. The existing literature on educational leadership in Kuwait has primarily focused on general trends and strategies, often overlooking the unique context of the Hawalli Educational District. This study aimed to address this gap by investigating specific educational leadership strategies employed by secondary public school principals in the district. The research sought to answer two main questions: (1) What do school principals in the Hawalli District consider the most effective educational leadership strategies for school development, and what are the reasons behind these beliefs? and (2) How do policies and directives set by the Hawalli Educational District influence the principals' leadership practices?

A qualitative research methodology was employed to achieve these objectives, involving semi-structured interviews with nine principals from secondary schools in the Hawalli Educational District. The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the principals' perspectives and experiences.

The study's findings revealed that principals in the Hawalli Educational District employ various leadership strategies, with collaboration and teamwork, transparency and open communication, flexibility and adaptability, and data-driven decision-

making being the most prominent. These strategies were chosen for their perceived effectiveness, potential to foster a positive school culture, emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, and commitment to a student-centred approach.

The study also identified several challenges that school leaders face, including school-building limitations, resistance to change, diverse student and teacher populations, and bureaucratic processes. These challenges highlight the need for ongoing support and professional development for principals to navigate the complexities of their roles effectively.

The impact of Hawalli Educational District policies on principals' leadership practices was a complex issue, with some principals finding the policies supportive and enabling. In contrast, others perceived them as restrictive and bureaucratic. This suggests room for improvement in the policy landscape to better support and empower school leaders. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on educational leadership in several ways.

First, it provides a detailed and context-specific understanding of the leadership strategies employed by secondary school principals in the Hawalli Educational District. This fills a gap in the literature that has often overlooked the unique context of this district. Second, the study identifies several distinctive practices not extensively discussed in the existing literature, such as using social media for communication and creating a "Diwaniyah corner" to foster a culturally relevant and inviting school environment. These examples highlight the resourcefulness and adaptability of school leaders in the Hawalli Educational District.

Third, the study's findings regarding the challenges faced by school leaders and the impact of district policies offer valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners. The study's recommendations for policy changes, such as increasing autonomy for school leaders and streamlining bureaucratic processes, could inform future policy decisions and improve the effectiveness of educational leadership in the district.

Overall, this study has answered the research questions by identifying the critical educational leadership strategies employed by principals in the Hawalli Educational District, the reasons behind their choices, and the influence of district policies on their practices. The findings have implications for various stakeholders in the educational community in Kuwait. For principals, the study provides insights into effective leadership strategies and challenges their peers face. For policymakers, the study highlights the need for policies that empower school leaders and provide them with the necessary support and resources. For researchers, the study identified areas for further investigation, such as the impact of leadership strategies on student outcomes and the role of cultural context in shaping leadership practices. By addressing these issues, future research can contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of educational leadership in Kuwait, ultimately leading to improved academic outcomes for all students.

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"ما هي استراتيجيات القيادة التربوية التي تؤثر على مديري المدارس الثانوية الحكومية في منطقة حولي التعليمية (الكويت) ولماذا يحدث ذلك؟"

إعداد الباحثة:

لولوة الصانع

الملخص:

تحقق هذه الدراسة النوعية في استراتيجيات القيادة التربوية التي يستخدمها مدراء المدارس الثانوية في منطقة حولي التعليمية في الكويت. تستكشف هذه الدراسة وجهات نظر المديرين بشأن أكثر الاستراتيجيات فعالية، وأسباب اختيارهم لهذه الاستراتيجيات، وتأثير سياسات منطقة حولي التعليمية على ممارساتهم القيادية. تم إجراء مقابلات شبه منظمة مع تسعة مدراء، وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي. كشفت النتائج أن المديرين يركزون على التعاون والعمل الجماعي، والشفافية والتواصل المفتوح، والمرونة والقدرة على التكيف كاستراتيجيات أساسية لتحسين المدارس. وأشار بعض المديرين أيضًا إلى أهمية اتخاذ القرارات المبنية على البيانات. تم اختيار هذه الاستراتيجيات لما لها من فاعلية متوقعة، وقدرتها على تعزيز ثقافة إيجابية داخل المدرسة، وارتباطها بالنهج المرتكز على الطالب. ومع ذلك، واجه المديرين تحديات مثل محدودية الميزانية والبنية التحتية للمدرسة، والمقاومة للتغيير، والحاجة إلى التكيف مع التنوع الثقافي. كما تم تحديد العمليات البيروقراطية وقلة الاستقلالية كعوائق إضافية. كان تأثير سياسات منطقة حولي التعليمية على ممارسات القيادة متباينًا، حيث وجد بعض المديرين أنها داعمة بينما رأى آخرون أنها مقيدة. تختتم الدراسة بتوصيات لتعزيز القيادة التربوية في منطقة حولي التعليمية، تشمل منح المديرين مزيدًا من الاستقلالية، وتبسيط العمليات البيروقراطية، وتقديم التدريب والدعم المستهدف. تساهم هذه الدراسة في فهم القيادة التربوية في السياق الكويتي وتقدم رؤى لصانعي السياسات والممارسين الساعين لتحسين القيادة المدرسية ونتائج الطلاب.